LIBRARY OF CONGRESS
1800

MEDITATIONS

FOR

THE AGED:

ADAPTED TO THE

PROGRESS OF HUMAN LIFE.

Lo!—"On he moves to meet his latter end,
"Angels around befriending virtue's friend;
"Sinks to the grave with unperceiv'd decay,
"While Resignation gently slopes the way,
"And all his prospects bright'ning to the last,
"His heaven commences ere this world be past!"

GOLDSMITH.

"Non putabam tam dulce, tam suave esse mori."

FRANCISCUS SUAREZ.

BY

JOHN BREWSTER, M.A.

RECTOR OF BOLDON, AND VICAR OF GREATHAM,
IN THE COUNTY OF DURHAM.

THE THIRD EDITION.

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS
1909
CITY OF WASHINGTON

London:

PRINTED FOR F. C. AND J. RIVINGTON,
NO. 62, ST. PAUL'S CHURCH-YARD;
By Law and Gilbert, St. John's Square, Clerkenwell.

1814.

BV4580
.B7
1814

TO

THE RIGHT HONOURABLE

THE EARL AND COUNTESS

OF

BRIDGEWATER:

IN GRATEFUL REMEMBRANCE

OF

MANY FAVOURS,

THE FOLLOWING MEDITATIONS

ARE

RESPECTFULLY INSCRIBED

BY

Greatham,
June 1, 1810.

THE AUTHOR.

ADVERTISEMENT

TO THE

SECOND EDITION.

TO be enabled to look forward to the enjoyment of an happy and a prosperous Old Age, the preparation for it should be commenced in the vigour of the mind, and in the fulness of health. Meditations proper for the Aged, therefore, are such as should have their origin at a much earlier period of human life; and should progressively increase in inward warmth, as the visible orb of their sun vanishes from the sky. The Author has endeavoured to meditate after this model; and to repose his thoughts on subjects suitable to his different stations as he tends towards the grave. If one gleam

of

of this departing ray should be permitted to gild the limit of his own horizon, or that of those friends who may travel with him the same journey, thankfully may they join in singing the Song of Aged Simeon, " *Lord!* " *now lettest thou thy servant depart in* " *peace, according to thy word, for our* " *eyes have seen thy Salvation!*"

CONTENTS.

CONTENTS.

MED.		PAGE
I.	How to meet advancing Age	1
II.	The true Consolation of Advancing Age	10
III. IV. V. VI.	An Estimate of Human Life under different Views	19
VII.	On the true Occupation of Time	56
VIII. IX.	On the Advantages of increasing Years	68
X.	The State of Old Age venerable	90
XI.	The Old Man in Society	101
XII.	The Old Man in Conversation	112
XIII.	The Old Man's Experience	123
XIV.	The Old Man in Retirement	134
XV.	The Old Man in Domestic Retirement	144
XVI.	The Old Man's Recollection of his Baptismal Vow	154
XVII.	The Old Man's Progressive Virtue ..	165
XVIII. XIX.	The Old Man's Relapse into Sin ...	177
XX.	The Old Man's Perseverance in Holiness	199
XXI. XXII.	On Weariness of Life	209

XXIII. The

MED.		PAGE
XXIII.	The Old Man's Infirmities of Mind..	230
XXIV. XXV.	The Old Man's Infirmities of Body..	242
XXVI.	On a vigorous and an healthy Old Age	279
XXVII. XXVIII. XXIX.	The Old Man's Preservation of the Intellectual Faculties.....	281
XXX. XXXI.	On the bad Habits and Vices of Old Age.....	314
XXXII.	On the Inconsideration of Old Age ..	334
XXXIII.	The Old Man's Distresses.....	347
XXXIV. XXXV.	The Old Man contemplating the Dead.....	361
XXXVI. XXXVII.	The Old Man's Duties in his last Sickness.....	383
XXXVIII. XXXIX.	The Lord's Supper: the last Seal of the Old Man's Faith.....	405
XL.	The Death-bed of the Just.....	427

ERRATA.

Page 33, line 13, *for* They *read* There
—— 130, —— 25, — with *read* within
—— 166, —— 8, — pro- *read* con-
—— 214, —— 12, — servant *read* burthen
—— — —— 13, — burthen *read* servant
—— 227, —— 1, — not *read* need
—— 425, —— 32, note, insert after to wish that

MEDI-

MEDITATIONS

FOR THE

AGED.

MEDITATION I.

How to meet Advancing Age.

——— So gentle life's decline,
We shut our eyes, and think it is a plain.

YOUNG.

IN every period of advancing life the unreflecting mind is liable to deception; but in no period is this more manifest than when we have passed the meridian of our days, and have taken our first foot-step towards old age. To mark that footstep well, however difficult, is necessary; because advancing years, if not happily improved, will bring with them increasing pains, and increasing sorrows.— MED. I.

MED. I.

Bare and hackneyed as the path of life is, when trod by thoughtless multitudes, deep and serious instruction will be found upon the road by those who contemplate the whole compass of their being, and consider the present moment only as introductory to the future. Mortality is called a *common topic*, and we pass by it in thought as easily, as carelessly, as we pass by the various memorials of it in a place of graves. But when the eye is suddenly arrested by the record of some well remembered, and once well beloved name, we start from the careless posture of the mind, feel the full force of serious reflection, and endeavour to become familiar with a state sanctified by the happy dead, and offering to us a prospect of the entrance into everlasting life.

If there be a time when the contemplative character is, more than at any other, suitable to our condition, it is this. The gay visions of youth are past. The energy of manhood is perceptibly declining. The shadow of our setting sun is lengthened; and though its feeble ray be still above the horizon, it is hastening to its close. The evening of the day is not more certain than the evening of

life. Both precede but a little the last faint gleam of their departing rays. It is time then to withdraw from busy scenes, futile cares, and empty pleasures, when more satisfying joys are rising to our sight. Let me thankfully accept the moment of recollection, and with the eye of religious meditation dart beyond the tomb, and cheer my mind with a view of future glories!

MED. I.

But every one is not qualified to meet advancing age. The wicked are wholly unprepared for it; and many who would be offended to be ranked in their society, are equally unfit for its approach. Though every other eye perceive it, the former *will not*, and the latter *do not* observe the alterations of time. The progress of human life being almost imperceptible, and its changes gradual, and the natural man feeling a reluctance to part with what indeed must be to him invaluable, its *present enjoyments*, he dares not trust himself with reflections on its *decline*: he therefore *shuts his eyes*, and—fatal delusion!—*thinks it is a plain.*

But this fancied *plain*, however extended, however amusing and diversified with the most alluring and pleasing scenes of nature,

MED. I. must gradually sink under our feet. We shall not have travelled far upon this road, before the declivity will be sensibly felt, and we shall be reminded from a thousand intervening circumstances that, a material change of country, or of climate, may soon be expected. After this warning, if we proceed further unprepared, our danger will be great; for as there is no returning to the place from whence we came, so will there be no new opportunity of retrieving what we have lost, or left behind, in the place to which we shall go.—What then will the wise man do? "Forgetting those things which are behind, "and reaching forth to those things which "are before, he will press towards the mark, "for the prize of the high calling of God in "Christ Jesus *."

Here, then, we begin to perceive the only principle which can make the latter years of human life comfortable. Many must necessarily be the deprivations attendant upon advancing age. The depredations of time, unaccelerated by vicious indulgencies or natural corruption, are sufficiently visible to every eye, and the decays, even of intellectual

* Phil. iii. 13.

strength,

strength, are felt in every heart. But there is a principle, which, though it cannot renovate our bodily powers, or retard the extinction of our mortal part, keeps alive the vital spark within us, gives new vigour to our decaying faculties, and illuminates with the beam of heaven and of hope the last moment of our earthly existence. That principle is *faith*: the faith of the Gospel, the sure and certain anchor of our souls. MED. I.

Many fine and brilliant passages on mortality may be found in the works of the ancients; many more, no less apposite and eloquent, in the writings of modern moralists. Yet in both something is wanting to bring the subject home to the heart. Do we inquire what that is which extinguishes the fear of death, which even makes that state an object of our earnest desire, and hearty wish? I once more answer in the language of eternal truth—"This is the victory which over-"cometh the world, even our *faith* *."

An abstract proposition may make an impression upon the mind, and sometimes recal it to serious thought. But if it be destitute of a proper motive, it will be wholly unpro-

* 1 John v. 4.

ductive.

MED. I. ductive. Thus the popular apophthegm, *death is common to all*, is in every mouth. But is it in every heart?—Do we ask ourselves, *why* death is common to all? Do we trace the question to its original source—"by man came death?" If we did, we should not only understand the cause of death, but the blessed means of obtaining everlasting life—"by man came also the resurrection of the "dead; for as in Adam all die, even so in "Christ shall all be made alive *."

Where can the old man rest with greater confidence, than on this single declaration of the revealed will of God? From the revolutions of time which his eyes have seen, he must surely have obtained full experience of the vanity of human actions, and be satisfied that those who trust in themselves, trust to a broken reed. What then should be the old man's conduct? A cheerful acquiescence in the dispensation of Providence, in compliance with the will of God made known to mankind. He should be ready to say with Job, "Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him †; and then may he welcome with a smile all the changes and chances of this mor-

* 1 Cor. xv. 21. † Job xiii. 15.

tal

tal life. Some of these perhaps may shake his trembling nerves; but he adopts the strong and pious language of the Apostle Paul. "I know in whom I have believed" —and in the spirit of such support, he will sustain his feeble frame, and feel his heart still stronger than his hand. MED. I.

That radical change, or well grounded stability of principle and conduct, which Christianity requires at every age from the cradle to the grave, should be doubly visible in the maturity of life. There is, at that period, but one great issue before our eyes. If we fall short here we are lost for ever.—But if the fervency of our prayer be equal to the importance of our petitions, we shall not ask, neither shall we labour in vain.

How delightful to behold old age attended by venerable and appropriate graces! How much more delightful, when those graces have accompanied us, by gradual improvement, through every stage of life, and we have grown old together! Amiable and excellent as every virtue, every *Christian* virtue shines, in its progress through the world, it acquires a *golden tint* as it verges to the ocean.

May all we whose lives Providence hath prolonged

MED. I. prolonged beyond the middle period of the age of man, expect advancing years with solid and substantial piety; for nothing but this can crown our heads with glory! May we employ our minds in holy meditation, and our tongues in prayer! May the book of God be ever in our hands! And may we catch the flame of devotion from many a venerable and holy sage who hath trod the path before us!

The meditation of one *, I will venture to suggest, whose pious mind gave fervency, if not sublimity, to his language—"Having "passed over the day, I render thanks to "thee, my God, for thy good providence. "The evening now draws on, make thou it "comfortable. But as each day has its eve- "ning, so likewise hath human life. Life's "evening is old age, make thou this also "comfortable. O cast me not away in the "time of age, neither forsake me when my "strength faileth me. Even to hoary hairs "do thou carry me. Thou hast made, and "hast sustained me hitherto, continue still "to support and to deliver me. Abide with "me, my Jesus, for the time is far spent; yea,

* Bishop Andrews.

"yea, the shadows of the evening are MED. I.
"stretched out, and the day is declining upon
"me. Let my strength now especially be
"made perfect in my weakness; for as the
"day, so life is near its end; a life wherein
"we scarcely live. The night posts on apace;
"so do that death, of which night is the
"image; a night after which we must expect
"no morning. In constant remembrance
"and due sense of which, I earnestly intreat
"thee, blessed Lord, to order such an end
"of life to me as may be truly *Christian*,
"acceptable to thee, and perfectly void of
"sin and shame, and, so far as thou seest
"fit, of extreme pain too. So gathering me
"to the remainder of thine elect, in peace
"and innocence, at my own time, and after
"thy own way, only let it be free from guilt
"and from reproach.—As long as I live I
"will magnify thee after this manner, and
"lift up my hands in thy name."

MEDITATION II.

The true Consolation of Advancing Age.

Here raptur'd, see, religion's evening ray
Gild the calm walks of his reposing age.
T. WARTON on Vale Royal Abbey.

MED. II.

THE traveller who is compelled to take a long journey and makes no preparation for his subsistence on the road, or whose preparation is so scanty and unsuitable to his condition that he faints for food, or is in great want of necessaries long before he has reached the place of his destination, resembles *him* who begins his journey of life without any provident preparation for his passage through it; and who finds himself even hard at death's door through the famine of his soul, even before he has entered into those days of darkness, which, by the constitution of Providence,

dence, generally attend on a prolonged state of our mortal existence. MED. II.

If the reflection be at all applicable to thy state, O my soul! let me accept it as an omen of good; and before swift-winged time shall have borne from me hours, days, and years, which have in them an intrinsic value, as affording continual opportunities of seeking those spiritual advantages, which without them would be lost for ever, let me prepare for my eternal journey by laying up treasure that will not fade, food that never can decay. If I set any just value on thy condition, my soul! I cannot be insensible of the importance of the preparation. My earthly habits draw my attention. I eat, drink, and am solicitous to have all my temporal wants supplied. The reason is, because my earthly frame cannot subsist without them. But when I see the abundance which is spread around us, when I reflect on the infinite variety which a merciful and kind Provider permits me to enjoy, may I not say with the Athenian philosopher, "How many things "are here, which I do *not* want!" Let me be thankful for, and satisfied with, these; but let me consider only one thing as absolutely

MED. II. lutely necessary. If I "seek *first* the king-"dom of God, and his righteousness," I may well be content with any addition which he may be pleased to make me; and what he takes from me, may I willingly resign!—There is no care of greater value, whether we note it or not, than the care of our immortal souls.

This care of the soul, at our first entrance on the study, startles us by its infinite importance, and presses upon us in many a serious thought, in many a penetrating reflection. We have a soul: *that* we have at last discovered. We have a soul *to be saved: that* is the object both of our hopes and fears. Happy for us, we begin to think; and when our thought is fixed, we begin to reason. Much now remains to be done: much, perhaps the severer task, remains to be *undone*. We have attained, by God's blessing, the middle period of life. We have lived in cities, and bustled through miseries and follies: we have lived in villages, and seen even those otherwise peaceful places visited by vices and crimes. The share we have had in both, now calls loudly for attention. We wish to retrace many of our foot-steps, and would

would gladly annihilate no inconsiderable portion of our existence. But the die is cast: *the deed is done.* What then remains? —repentance. But can repentance recal the long accomplished sin? Can repentance restore life to the body that has been destroyed? *Would it could!* says almost every murderer*. Can it give purity to the mind which has been led astray, and left forlorn and destitute by an insidious and unrelenting seducer! *Would it could!* says almost every unhappy person of that description. To what then must we look for a restoration of solid and substantial peace under circumstances so critical? To whom must we apply? We have but one resource; but that is all-sufficient. We must turn our eye on Him, "who his "own self bare our sins in his own body on "the tree, that we, being dead to sin, should "live unto righteousness†." Here we have one to do for us, what even repentance could not effect. We are to be saved *solely* through his merits, and by his mediation. Repent- MED. II.

* "How is it with me, when every noise appals me? "Wake, Duncan with this knocking. *'Would thou couldst!"* MACBETH.

† 1 Pet. ii. 24.

ance

MED. II. ance then takes its proper place in the heart, when it is presented before God by the Saviour of man, as a fruit of that faith which opens the kingdom of heaven to all believers.

This belief, and the corresponding duties, necessary from the earliest moment of our lives, are peculiarly desirable as we approach the limit of human life. Impiety and iniquity melt before us. And though after all, we feel ourselves still too much oppressed, we rejoice in having cast away such heavy fetters. The happy voice of liberty sounds in our ears—"we are no more strangers and "pilgrims, but fellow-citizens with the saints, "and of the household of God*."

This change, the voice of inspiration emphatically describes as a *new creation* in the soul. We breathe a freer and a purer air. We are altered in our habit, temper, disposition. Our thoughts, which partook too much of earth, now centre in heaven. What we once called mirth and gaiety, divine truth pronounces dissipation, and inconsistent with that sobriety of character which christianity invariably demands. But divine truth does

* Eph. ii. 19.

not

not offer gloom and melancholy in their stead. No, it informs us that religious faith is always a chearful principle to the true believer; that the Author of our salvation was himself a partaker of the inoffensive feast; and that love, in its purest and most attractive form, is one great emanation of his Gospel. MED. II.

When we have brought our convert to this point in the journey of human life, we have shewn him what is indeed the true consolation of advancing years. He begins to estimate the intrinsic value of that condition which he still possesses; he compares it with one much more valuable which he has in view; and though he may not wish to accelerate the period of old age, he is neither fearful of its approach, nor shrinks at its arrival. The paroxism of former follies is over. His hoary head is not exposed to a stormy sky. He receives the bright beam of the evening on his venerable and placid countenance; and his breast, more venerable and more placid, reflects that ray of heaven, which unites his holy mind with celestial associates.

Can any picture be presented to us more congenial with the finest feelings of our nature

MED. II. ture than that of a pious, religious, and happy old man?—happy, *because* pious and religious—happy, not from the pleasures of a visionary imagination, or from the effects of dull insensibility; but happy, from the pure object of his faith and love, the beginning and the end of all the desires of his soul.

When a man has attained the maturity of life, he must be blind indeed to the natural course of Providence, who does not perceive his tendency to decay. He must also have been very little acquainted with his own heart, less with the world, and still less with his God, who, at his years, is unable to appreciate the value of each. How delightful to hear a good man relate his own experience of life, at so critical a period! The declaration of such an one is at hand.

"Let me here be allowed," said the amiable Professor Gellert to his friends and pupils, "to make an ingenuous confession, I "have lived *fifty* years, during which I have "had many subjects of joy; none of these "have been more lasting, more innocent, "more satisfactory to my heart, than those "I have sought and tasted in following the "counsels of religion, whose mild restraints

"captivated

" captivated my soul; this I attest to be truth on my conscience. I have lived *fifty* years, and have experienced many afflictions, but I never obtained more light in my perplexities, more comfort, more consolation, more strength and courage in my troubles, than what I have derived from religion; and this I attest on my conscience. I have lived *fifty* years, and have frequently found myself on the borders of the grave, and I have experienced that nothing, no, nothing can help us to triumph over the fears of death, but the divine efficacy of religion in our souls; that nothing is so powerful in strengthening it in these decisive moments, in which it sees itself, not without emotion, on the confines of eternity; and for calming us when our conscience rises up against us, nothing so efficacious, as faith in our divine Saviour and Redeemer; I attest this as in the presence of God. O! if the testimony of a friend, of a tutor, can have any weight with you, if mine, my dear young friends, can have any influence, over you, whenever any presumptuous reasoner would set you against the doctrines of the holy

MED. II.

MED. II.

" Scriptures, or when the infidel, not know-
" ing how to tranquillize his own mind, un-
" dertakes to extinguish in yours a belief,
" the holiness of which confounds him—O
" Christian youth, let him never find one
" amongst you who may dare to despise the
" most excellent of all books, and make it a
" subject of raillery! Let the Scripture be
" at all times the object of your veneration;
" it constitutes your happiness on earth, and
" secures it in heaven*."

* The Life of Professor Gellert with a Course of Moral Lessons delivered by him in the University of Leipsic, 3 vols. translated by Mrs. Douglas, of Ednam-house.

MEDITATION III.

An Estimate of Human Life.

Nor love thy life nor hate; but what thou liv'st
Live well; how long or short permit to heaven.
MILTON.

MED. III.

THE regulation of the human passions, and a mind adjusted to the true standard of religious principle, will produce that sound judgment and consistency of conduct, which will be the highest ornament and the most estimable quality of the decline of life. It has been observed, and certainly with much truth, that, as men approach the period of their days, the very contrary habits of the mind frequently appear in them, from those which might reasonably have been expected. Instead of saying in the fulness of age and comfort, and under the impression of a true sense of their mortal condition—"I have had

MED. III. " enough of life—I am ready to be dis-
" solved—I will hail the hour of my depar-
" ture as an hour of deliverance and joy"—
they cling still closer to the present scene of things; they calculate the value, the *worldly value*, of every passing moment; they linger upon the stage of life with a painful anxiety, and at last quit it with a visible, and no less painful, reluctance.

As a moral contrast to such an unpleasant feature of old age, it may also be remarked, and I am confident with equal truth, that, in many instances, when youth, health, and beauty have been called upon by Divine Providence to submit to a premature declension of all those qualities which are thought to render life agreeable, and the termination of many a flattering prospect is at hand, they have met all with a firmness of mind founded on a religious hope, which, in the strong language of Scripture, hath *swallowed up death in victory*.

If it be inquired, whence arises the difference of conduct in these two conditions of human life? We may answer in one word. *From the world! that* world so justly, and so feelingly, condemned by St. John—
" Love

"Love not the world, neither the things "hat are in the world. If any man love "the world, the love of the Father is not in "him: for all that is in the world, the lust "of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the "pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of "the world:"—The conclusion is most appropriate to the shifting scene of man's existence—"and the world passeth away and "the lust thereof, but he that doeth the "will of God abideth for ever*." MED. III.

In youth every feeling of the heart is warm, every energy of the mind and body healthy and elastic. Selfish cares have as yet made no impression; and we will imagine that the corruption of nature, by the introduction of sound religious principles has been considerably meliorated and repressed. How does the love of God burst from such a breast! How grateful does the eye turn upon Him who makes the light of righteousness to shine within him! How ardently does he adopt the prayer of the youthful Stephen, "Lord Jesus receive my spirit†."

Many, many, in the autumn of their days,

* 1 John ii. 15, 16, 17. † Acts vii. 59.

would

MED. III.

would bestow all the riches which their long lives have amassed, to recover those heavenly impressions, that celestial tranquillity, which they remember to have possessed in their youth. But all those brilliant colours are faded from their sight. Yet all is not lost. Something may still be found to prevent the most fatal consequences. Though we cannot tread over again the same weary and lamented steps, while the day still dawns upon us, an opportunity remains, through the grace and favour of God, to redeem our mis-spent time. The *last hour* was valuable to the labourers; it may be so to us, if, through faith and repentance, we become acceptable to the Lord of the vineyard.

But how much wiser is their conduct, how much better is their condition, who, from youth to age, retain their religious integrity; who, *after they have escaped the corruption of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ*, continue in the way of righteousness which they have known, and expect that favour, which their gracious Judge will not fail to bestow.

When we have taken this contrasted view of life, and are standing upon the limits of old

old age, what will be then our opinion of the value that should be put upon it? Shall we call life a trifle, and its transitory scenes mere visions of a morning dream? Alas! such is the light reflection of the thoughtless; such also is the wish of the profligate. The language of the one, and the fears of the other meet in the same conclusion. But the roses are hardly scattered before they fade; the delusive sin is hardly tasted before its sting is felt. If we call life a trifle, what are all those doing who are working out their salvation with fear and trembling? If we call life a trifle, what is the value of their employment, who are compassing sea and land to make one proselyte? If life be a mere passage—to *nothing*, as some of these imagine, or perhaps to a recompense which they have not deserved, as others vainly hope—why have we seen those whom the wiser part of the world have stiled *the best of men*, exhausting every power of nature, first in conquering their own faults, afterwards in subduing the inveterate principles and faults of others? Why have we seen earthly crowns despised, and crowns of glory ardently desired? Why have we seen men patient in tribulation,

MED. III.

MED. III. tribulation, nay, rejoicing in affliction, unless it were to shew us that God hath provided various means for sanctifying his servants? *That* life can be *no* trifle which God permits to be productive of so much good.

Another consideration carries us one step farther, and brings the argument with full force upon our bosoms.—We are reflecting on the *value* of life. Can that life be without value which puts us in possession of eternity? Had not a God of mercy, and of infinite benevolence given us that being which we now possess, we could never have been capable of receiving such accumulated blessings. *Mere creation*, therefore, is an object of everlasting thankfulness. No man ought to exclaim like Job in his despondency—*let the day perish wherein I was born!*—and for this reason, given by Job's friend—*remember, I pray thee, whoever perished being innocent, or where were the righteous cut off*?* "Wherefore, indeed, should a living man "complain? a man, for the punishment of "his sins†?" Creation in itself can be no object of regret; unless dull insensibility, or

* Job iii. 3, 4. 7. † Lam. iii. 39.

rather

rather obdurate wickedness, would change conditions with a stone. MED. III.

Having advanced thus far into life, and feeling ourselves endowed with faculties various and peculiar, the penetrating ray of reason instructs us to consider that, we were placed here for some wise and benefical end. We feel ourselves capable of great things; and had we not attained gradually and imperceptibly to the use of all our bodily and intellectual endowments, we should have been astonished at ourselves, at the admirable and complicated qualities essential to our nature. *So fearfully and wonderfully are we made!*

But there is another circumstance which excites our astonishment, and perplexes the best qualities of the rational man. *We find a law in our members warring against the law of our mind, and bringing us into captivity to the law of sin**. How shall we solve this apparently unsurmountable difficulty in the history of man? Reason is not equal to the task. Learning despises the inquiry. Human reason is too weak, and human learn-

* Rom. vii. 23.

ing

MED. III.

ing too blind, to see all the wonderous things of God's law. A supernatural revelation discloses the fearful truth; and once more enhances the *value of life*, by presenting unto us *redemption*. We are thus made acquainted with another object of our gratitude, our *Redeemer himself*, who, though differing in *person* from our Almighty Creator, is the same kind and beneficent Giver of every good gift. Nor is this all. We become acquainted with the *Sanctifier of our souls;* for redemption itself would be incomplete without the sanctifying graces of that pure, holy, and enlivening spirit, who checks every corrupt motion of the heart, and renders it acceptable in the sight of a pure and holy God.

Who will depreciate the value of *life*, which possesses, from that circumstance alone, such inestimable acquisitions? That foolish man does not use these precious gifts to the best purposes of his soul, is not the fault of the Bestower. "I called and ye "refused," is a sufficient vindication of the Divine Justice in the infliction of punishment. In a state of nature we are children of wrath: in a state of grace we are

are the objects of God's unmerited compassion. MED. III.

To consider human life, which comprehends only a part, and that a very small part of man's existence as worth all the labour and pains which are generally bestowed upon it, to heap up riches as if there were no end of wealth, to pursue pleasure through every circling maze, as if pleasure, and pleasure only, were the life and soul of this mortal being, is to consider it as far above its value; or rather it is to counterfeit a coin, unacknowledged by any legitimate sovereign. On the contrary, to despise life, and the blessings which it brings, to court gloom in the midst of nature's sunshine, to reject the flowers of the spring because they have led astray the thoughtless, is to lower the value of that state, which was undoubtedly given for the everlasting welfare of many millions of mankind.

Love not, then, thy Life, nor hate—but weigh it in the true balance of the sanctuary. Examine it, not exaggerated by human feelings, not influenced by human passions, but estimated at that value, of which thou mayest thyself judge, when the heavens are rolled

up

MED. III. up as a curtain, and Eternity is open to thy view.

And may that just Estimate of human life, which I recommend to others, be beneficial to myself, *lest when I have preached to others, I myself should be a cast-away!*

MEDITATION IV.

An Estimate of Human Life.

On life, or death, is equal, neither weighs,
All weight is this—Oh! let me live to thee.

YOUNG.

MED. IV.

HAPPY the mind that, by Divine Grace, is capable of acquiescing in the sentiment of the pious poet—*or life, or death, is equal*: but happier far, if the scale preponderate in favour of eternity. It may be thought perhaps that in endeavouring to attain a perfect equality of mind in the important consideration of life and death, we may degenerate into an apathy of character which is dangerous in a moral light, and destructive of the best purposes of human society. Undoubtedly to blunt the faculties of man is to do him an irreparable injury; it is to take away the very essence of *patient suffering*, and to remove

MED. IV.

move an effect which alone gives a value to the cause. Had not human feeling been an essential quality of man, and absolutely necessary for the happiness of that being with which he is endowed, a benevolent Providence, which never acts in vain, would not have bestowed it on him.

But to heighten that feeling, by artificial means, to a point *where agony begins*, is by no means to be guided by reason, much less by the sure word of revelation. An *excessive* attachment, even to common things, is condemned by every well-judging and well-experienced mind. When we are children, we think, speak, and act, as children: but in time and experience make no impression upon us, if a maturer judgment does not dawn upon our souls with maturer years, we shall be treated as children still. Thus in contemplating human life, if we make no difference in our judgment of it, after we have been partakers of the mysteries of revelation; if what we once thought a bawble, continues in our estimation a bawble still, we may justly be accused of preferring darkness to light, courting ignorance, and rejecting the most valuable information.

If

MED. IV.

If we go one step farther, and retain an excessive attachment, not only to common things, but to things in themselves vicious, or tending to vice, our conduct is so decidedly wrong, that no man of the most ordinary understanding, or the lowest pretensions to knowledge, will presume to vindicate it. And yet, notwithstanding this almost self-evident truth, such is the natural tendency of the mind, that, if it be not checked by moral and religious motives, the progress is rapid to destruction.

But let us not mistake the injunction in our estimate of human life—"nor love thy "life, nor hate"—"or life or death is equal." *Life* must not be understood, as if the word implied, the *consequences of life ;* including all those varieties, good and bad, which glide before our eyes, or rest within our hearts, in our transitory passage to eternity. *Life*, in this sense, must not include those domestic felicities, or family disquietudes, those public advantages, or private injuries, which, under different circumstances, are the lot of all mankind ; but simply, that gift of *being* which we have received from our great Creator, and, without which, neither happiness

MED. IV. piness nor misery, neither pain nor pleasure, temporal or eternal, could have been our portion. It is the station, rather than the condition of life, which, at present, comes within our contemplation.

A being, formed for eternity, and weighing life in this balance, believing at the same time that all things shall come to pass which the voice of God hath infallibly proclaimed, cannot but make a just conclusion on his own situation. Why should any man, thus disposed in principle, love or hate life, *abstractedly* considered? If one motion of his mind lead him to decide absolutely on the subject, a moment's serious thought will inform him that the cause of his decision proceeds not from *life*, but from the *use* he has made of it. If he has acted as a good and rational man ought to act, in obedience to the Author of his being, he will not love life for the sake of a continuance in it, but for the sake of that good which it is capable of producing: if he hate life because it has brought him no comfort, let him examine himself, how he has discharged the duties of it: for if he has failed, or fallen short in these, he will be less ready to meet that which is to come. If life has been

been productive of uneasiness at every stage, or if occasional unhappiness has been his lot; let him ask his own heart, whether true religion has always been his companion? This inquiry, faithfully answered, will remove many difficulties from the mind of the discontented. This will explain our love or hatred of life, and will reconcile us to that condition of nature in which we are placed. MED. IV

In the same manner may we argue in our reflections on the equality of life and death —"or life or death is equal, neither weighs'. They may be many reasons for our wishing for life: but there is one good reason for acquiescing in death, which swallows all the rest. The expression of St. Paul's thoughts on this comparison is so far beyond those of the most pious man alive, that they cannot be read without emotion, nor contemplated, without an earnest prayer that his happy choice may be ours. "For me," says he, "to live is Christ, and to die is gain. But if "I live in the flesh this is the fruit of my labour," that I may promote his glory, whose I am, and whom I serve, and with whom in his own good time I hope to be; "yet what "I shall choose, at present I wot not; for I

MED. IV. "am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire "to depart and to be with Christ; which is "far better*." A pious interpreter considers the expression to allude to a ship stationed at a particular place, and riding at anchor, and at the same time likely to be forced to sea by the violence of the winds: which, he says, presents us with a lively representation of the Apostle's attachment to his situation in the Christian church, and the vehemence of his desire to be *unbound*, to be unmoored, as we should say, to weigh anchor, and set sail, for the heavenly country. Thus, whether I should desire life or death, might the Apostle reason with himself, I know not: *for I am*, as it were, borne two different ways; having, on the one hand, a more earnest *desire*, out of regard to my own immediate happiness, *to be unbound*, to weigh anchor, as it were, *and*, quitting these mortal shores, set sail for that happy world, where I shall *be* immediately with Christ, *which is better* beyond all comparison and expression than a longer abode here would be, were I to regard my own immediate comfort and happi-

* Phil. i. 21.

ness;

ness ; but to abide in the flesh is more expedient and necessary for you, who need my further assistance*." MED. IV.

When the good Christian on his death-bed, surrounded by kind, though weeping friends, meditates on the comparative value of life and death, let him rest on this holy contemplation of Paul. His own removal, through the firmness of his faith, cannot but be for his advantage. And though a lingering and an allowable anxiety for his family, friends, and dependents, may gently agitate his feelings, it will not destroy his complacency, or interrupt his fortitude. His trust continues steady, because he knows *whom he has believed.* His language is the language of Christian comfort and holy hope ; the spirit of God springs fresh within his breast ; it enlivens his own heart, and revives that of those who are so interested in his departure— "*Only* let your conversation, your conduct "in life be such as becometh the Gospel of "Christ, that whether I live or die, be pre- "sent or absent, we may be assured, that an "hour will arrive when it will have been a

* Doddridge in locum.

MED. IV. "mutual comfort to us, that we have *stood* "*fast in one spirit with one mind, striving* "*together for the faith*, and consequently "for the blessed effects *of the Gospel* *."

It will be evident how much a pure, holy, and confirmed *faith* is concerned in such a deliberation as this. If we live not *in* Christ, we cannot die *to* Christ. And as his resurrection is an assurance of our own, if we do not firmly believe the one, we must necessarily have considerable doubts of the other. But if we flatter ourselves that we believe, and yet are not joined in one mystical union with our Saviour in heaven, and with his Saints on earth, which is the true principle of our *holy catholic church*, our prospect of an immortal life must be attended with innumerable fears.

I do not presume to appreciate what *his* feelings, or *his* fears may be, who *says in his heart that there is no God:* nor yet of *his*, who pretends to acknowledge the being of a God, and wholly disbelieves a divine revelation of his will. If there be no God, there can be no future state. What then will be

* Phil. i. 27.

the

the value of *life?* If there be a God that hath made no revelation of his will, consequently hath afforded not one gleam of hope beyond the grave, what will be the value of *death?*—The expectation of annihilation will add no value to a *life* where all moral principle has been wanting: it will give no comfort to a *death* where every thought, every word, every action, every friend and every foe, is buried in one eternal oblivion. MED. IV.

Happy Christian! sleep in peace; thy Saviour is *thy* kind and compassionate friend, through all the stages of thy various life; and if, by Divine Grace, thou continuest *faithful unto death*, thou mayest look forward to his further help, when he shall open for thee the gate of an everlasting state of existence.

Give me, O my God! a death of peace, an happy assurance, a reviving hope; that I may be enabled in my last hour, with the first Martyr Stephen, to look up to heaven, and to say, *Lord Jesus! receive my spirit.* Amen.

MEDI-

MEDITATION V.

An Estimate of Human Life.

That life is long, which answers life's great end—
The time that bears no fruit, deserves no name.

YOUNG.

MED. V.

WHEN I meditate on human life, and on the various scenes which it presents, my mind is lost in astonishment: and when I reflect on the particular part which I have been called upon to sustain, I find too much reason to lament opportunities of improvement which I have lost, and important duties which I have neglected to fulfil. When I dive a little deeper into the contemplation, and inquire the causes which have led to such repeated delinquencies, I find, in the character of my natural man, many discordant principles warring with the law of my inclination, and leading me into the bondage

bondage of sin. *Here* I discover the motive of my conduct, and the cause of my sin. If I remain under the constraint of such a fatal bondage, I shall be undone for ever. Yet, on consulting the word of God, I trust that, my case is not without hope. If I accept with an humble and a contrite heart, the offers of salvation through the alone merits and mercies of my Saviour, if I do not resist the spirit of Divine Grace, which, through faith, is shed abundantly on the penitent, I perceive a cure, an effectual and perfect cure, as ready as my offence. MED. V.

If I pass from the prospect of my own wickedness, to a view of the world around me, *buried*, like myself, *in trespasses and sins*, and am induced in the words of the ardent, but truly humbled Apostle, to exclaim,—"Oh! wretched man that I am! "Who shall deliver me from this body of "death"—this accumulated sin, which harrasses, and oppresses, my soul?—the voice of the same Apostle is ready to reply,—"The grace of God through Jesus Christ "our Lord*." This is that deliverance

* Rom. vii. 24.

which

MED. V.

which sets me free, and after many a painful conflict encourages me to say, "Thanks "be to God, who thus giveth us the victory*!"

While we are toiling through human life, like him whose skiff can hardly support him on the wave, what energy does it give to our arm, what vigour to our exertion, to find that breeze springing up which will convey us to a secure haven! Such is the help which God affords us by his spirit.

When a man has advanced far into life, and, to carry on the former metaphor, looks back on the shoals and quicksands which he has past in safety, he may well reflect, what compass could have directed his course, if not guided by any invisible hand; what polar star have shed its cheering beam, if not instructed by its Maker! "When thou "passest through the waters I will be with "thee; and through the rivers, they shall "not overflow thee—for I am the Lord thy "God, the Holy One of Israel thy Savi-"our†." No human judgment, or human powers, can indeed steer us through the tem-

* 1 Cor. xv. 57. † Isai. xliii. 2.

pest;

pest; nothing that we call *chance* can preserve us from being overwhelmed in the tumultuous ocean. The eye of Omnipotence alone is able to watch our steps; and his providential care, sometimes immediately exerted, and sometimes through the medium of second causes, is alone equal to our preservation. MED. V.

But what is our personal *temporal* safety, to the safety of our souls? Here the same star rules, the same hand directs: and we must shut our eyes against the one, and spurn away the other, before we can be given up to final destruction. In the midst of such dangers, it is matter of confidence and comfort to be assured, that *God's grace is sufficient for us.*

For this purpose, as every possible assistance will be required, every heavenly succour will be afforded, to carry us in safety through this state of our probation. That this life *is* a state of probation, we have every reason to be acquainted; and that, as we shall have acquitted ourselves under those circumstances in which we have been placed, according to the abilities which we have possessed, and according to the opportunities which

MED. V. which we have enjoyed, we shall hereafter be punished or rewarded, is a great evangelical truth. We might perhaps have conjectured such a state from the deductions of reason, but we never could have been assured of its certainty, but from revelation. The clear illustration of a future state, both as to its nature, and the final distribution of its appointments, arises from a full and complete display of those internal and external evidences of the truth of that blessed Gospel, which is the only sure and stedfast anchor of our souls. These evidences give the good Christian leave to exult in the confidence of *hope;* the hope of a reward promised in, and for the sake of, our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, "who *for the joy that was* "*set before him*, endured the cross, de- "spising the shame, and *is for ever set* "*down at the right hand of the throne of* "*God**." These evidences, too, impress the wicked with the apprehension of *fear;* and as he cannot expunge them from the record of the law, or from his own mind, he must remain under a sense of guilt, which will have its fatal termination *(unless faith*

* Heb. xii. 2.

and

and repentance turn aside the blow) in irremediable and everlasting punishment. MED. V.

Life is a state of probation—we allow it. But before we make the observation a principle of action, we ought to inquire *how* it becomes a state of probation? Take man as he is, and as he appears to be (however he may boast of the sound and perfect faculty of reason) and we shall find him a frail, uncertain, erring, and offending being. Sinning and repenting is the diurnal of his history under the most favourable circumstances; and if the latter be accepted as efficacious to his salvation, he will not lose his *reward*. But how *reward?*—What does he merit? What has he done?—Were he to rely on the goodness of his own works, his reward would be distant indeed. But are the good deeds of men of no value in the sight of God? Of none, if we expect to merit *by them;* but of much, if they are performed, not for their own sake, but for the sake of Him, who merited all for us.

This is an important consideration, when we call life a state of probation. I have seen the poor ignorant man upon the bed of death. I have beheld the man of higher attain-

MED. V.

attainments, and superior fortune in a similar situation. I have heard each of them exclaim, "I am not afraid to die: I have "never wronged any man, and am at peace "with all my neighbours."—If this were *true*, it is but a slender history of the *Christian life*. Indeed charity itself must disclaim such as genuine disciples of the Gospel; nay, as in total ignorance of those divine principles, of which perhaps they have long imagined themselves partakers. But when we call life a state of probation, we can only mean, in the evangelical sense of the expression, with reference to *every obligation of the Christian covenant*. "Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the "faith: prove your own selves*."—"Let "every man prove his own work, and then "he shall have rejoicing†."

When many misfortunes and adversities have attended a man from early youth to hoary age; when his health is broken, his body bent, and his spirits wholly gone; when every rallying principle is sunk within him; it is not unusual to hear such proclaim in

* 2 Cor. xiii. 5. † Gal. vi. 4.

the

the anguish of his soul, " Fortune has done " its worst: I go to the land were all things " are forgotten—" *where the wicked cease* " *from troubling, and the weary are at* " *rest.*"—Indeed! Is this the whole improvement of a life of sorrow? Do pains, and troubles, and afflictions, operate as *equivalents* to virtue? Are they considered by the Almighty as an atonement for personal offences?—That is not, says the Christian, in my Bible. Thou has been unhappy, and I pity thee. Thou hast had perhaps more than thy share of weeping, and I sympathize with thy tears—but I commend thee not. It is not because thou hast been poor, and miserable, and blind, and naked, in a temporal sense, that thy reward is with thee. By no means. But if thou hadst been sensible of the natural poverty, wretchedness, blindness, and nakedness of thy condition, if thou hadst made these the means of improving thy spiritual state, then thy life might have been called a state of probation, and the reward of the righteous would have been thy portion. MED. V.

The martyrs and confessors of old, good Christians in affliction of every age and nation,

MED. V.

tion, are so many spiritual examples of a life of probation. "These all obtained, "through faith, a good report*." Paul, the great and good Apostle, offers himself to our view in this glorious company, stating the true course and cause of Christian improvement, under the several changes and chances of this mortal life; *approving himhimself a minister of God* in almost every description of painful suffering; glorying even in his tribulations, "knowing that tri- "bulation worketh patience; and patience, "experience; and experience, hope; and "hope maketh not ashamed, because the "love of God is shed abroad in our hearts "by the Holy Ghost which is given unto "us †."

"Those only who live to God in the "continual exercise of faith and love, of "patience, humility, resignation, and obe- "dience, obtain the conquest of the world; "and enjoy those divine comforts, that "are promised to every soul that forsakes "all to follow Christ: and there only truly "discover, how grievously the lovers of the

* Heb. xi. 39. † Rom. v. 3.

"world

" world are mistaken; and in how many " various ways they are defrauded of happi- " ness, and left destitute and wretched *." MED. V.

Try me, O God! but let not my trial be more than I can bear.—" *Try me, O God!* " *and seek the ground of my heart; prove* " *me, and examine my thoughts. Look well* " *if there be any way of wickedness in me,* " *and lead me in the way everlasting* †."

* Payne's T. à Kempis, p. 173.
† Ps. cxxxix. 23, 24.

MEDI-

MEDITATION VI.

An Estimate of Human Life.

Who venerate themselves the world despise.
YOUNG.

MED. VI.

AS interest is the ruling principle of worldly wisdom, it might reasonably be expected that the personal interest of man would be his first and greatest care. And so it would, if he did not deceive himself by casting an impenetrable veil before the prospect of eternity. His meditations do not take in the *whole* of his being, therefore they are imperfect, unsatisfactory, and dangerous.

If the life of man consisted only in efforts to support its temporary state of existence, and to prolong the passing day; if it even went a little further, and added enjoyment to subsistence, it would be well, provided *mere* life, or *mere* enjoyment were the proposed

posed end of his earthly habitation. The noblest, or the meanest, animal, that prowls the forest in quest of prey, and having found it lays him down in his den till his necessity or his pleasure prompt him to repeat his search, is an emblem of man, under these circumstances of mere animal gratification. MED. VI.

But if there be other ends to be answered by the life of man—if he be required to glorify God, and glorify him not—if he be told that his will by nature is perverse and corrupt, and that he must seek his renovation in the mercies of a revealed Saviour, and seek him not—if he be assured that a Divine Spirit will supply him with heavenly comforts by fervent and diligent prayers, and he pray not for his assistance—if he be informed that he ought not to live for himself alone, but for every man that requires his help when he is able to bestow it, and he bestow it not—surely he must be convicted of folly, in preferring an inadequate estimate of human life; surely he must be condemned for wilful disobedience, in rejecting so great salvation.

It will not be difficult for man to appreciate his true interest under this consideration: and if, at the same time, we reflect on his

MED. VI.

usual predilection for his own happiness, it must excite our admiration that he should not adopt the most probable method of securing it.

Venerate thyself!—Can a precept more congenial to the best feelings of man's nature, be offered to his contemplation? If we do *not* venerate ourselves, we must be convinced that all is not as it should be at the heart.—We have a conscience which accuses, or else excuses us, to ourselves, to our fellow-creatures, and to our God. We have a written, revealed, *divine* law, which corroborates our conscience, which checks the errors and wanderings of our judgment, which infuses sound principles, that correct our natural propensity to evil, and induce the most desirable, the most satisfying, good. When these actuate the soul with their utmost energy, when the soul is sensible of their influence, and leaps, as it were, to receive them; *then* the man *venerates himself;* then, and not till then, he feels the true dignity of his nature, a dignity to be acquired from no other principle.

When we have arrived at this true point of self-estimation, and have reflected on the steps by which only it may be attained, we may

may then calculate with greater accuracy the value of life, not only as it regards ourselves, but in some measure as it respects our intercourse with others. Far be it from our thoughts to imitate the self-righteous Pharisee: or to think highly of ourselves *because* others may not have made the same progress in the Christian course. Comparisons of this nature are hardly compatible with religious humility. To his own master every man standeth or falleth. All that belongs to us is to maintain our *own* ground: and to endeavour, as a point of duty, to assist others in attaining the same elevated standard.—"When thou art converted," said our Lord to Peter, "strengthen thy brethren*." The weak in faith require nourishment and compassion.—"Take heed that ye despise not one "of these little ones †."

MED. VI.

But he who venerates himself, who has a true regard for his own Christian character, and is, upon the best principles, desirous of retaining his integrity, must be collected, vigilant, circumspect. One unguarded moment would offer an assailable breach for nu-

* Luke xxii. 32. † Matt. xviii. 10.

MED. VI.

merous and bitter enemies. The great enemy of man saw Adam happy in Paradise, and won him by temptation; and in continued succession since the days of Adam, the same fatal scene has been repeatedly acted, and with the same success.—"These things "are written for our admonition."

But what power remains among us now, which is able to compass such complicated mischief? The same power which destroyed Adam—the same power which has destroyed thousands since Adam—the same power which will destroy us also, if we resist not his malicious operations through the more powerful assistance of God's holy spirit—even "the Prince of the power of the air, (as he "is emphatically called, from the pervading "malignity of his nature) who now worketh "in the children of disobedience *."

The various shapes by which man is tempted, and by which the stability of man must be tried, may be comprised in one word, a word continually used in this sense by the sacred writers, and in this sense held forth as a warning to all the proselytes of the Gospel—THE WORLD! It would be unnecessary to proceed to a definition of the ex-

* Eph. ii. 2.

pression,

pression, as it stands opposed to pure faith and holy practice. The great body of mankind is called *the world*, in a general and extensive sense; but from the universal prevalence of evil, it has been restricted to two descriptions of persons, whose *worldly thoughts* not unaptly obtain for their possessors this denomination;—those, whose inveterate unbelief has been productive of as inveterate evil habits; and those whom we may call *half believers*, (and thus surely in effect no believers at all) who profess that they know the truth, but in every imagination, word, and work, deny it. "If the world hate you," said our blessed Saviour, "ye know that it "hated me, before it hated you*." This was a signal of character, as distinctive and conspicuous, as the horses and fiery chariot of Elijah, which separated him from a world that was unworthy of him, and carried him immediately to heaven. MED. VI.

Despise the world! Ah! how difficult when we wish, when we pray for its reformation. *Despise the world!* How joyful and exulting, when we have escaped from its snares and temptations! *Despise the world!* Yea, heartily and fervently when we see its seductions,

* John xv. 18.

when

MED. VI.

when we behold its wickedness, when we have felt its vanities. How gladly do we rush from the contagion of it to breathe a freer and a purer air! With not less alacrity and joy than just Lot escaping from the gate of Sodom, when the cheering sun-beam was rising upon Zoar, the city of his refuge, and the asylum of his virtue and integrity.

"As one, who long in pop'lous city pent,
"Where houses thick and sew'rs annoy the air,
"Forth issuing on a summer's morn to breathe
"Among the pleasant villages and farms
"Adjoined, from each thing met conceives delight;
"The smell of grain, or tedded grass, or kine,
"Or dairy, each rural sight, each rural sound."

Not the charms of poetry, not the charms of *Milton*, can convey to the mind a sensation of pleasure equal to that of him, who has been enabled by Divine Grace to escape from the poisonous infection of a wicked world, to taste the pure enjoyment of the spiritual life. All here is calm, serene, gratifying, and sweet. The contrast adds new comfort to the enjoyment: nor can it be surpassed, but by the undefined and exquisite description of heaven, where "Eye hath not "seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered "into the heart of man, the things which "God hath prepared for them that love him*."

* 1 Cor. ii. 9.

MED. VI.

Contempt of the world, in this sense, becomes the obligation of the Christian; and particularly at that advancing period of human life, when experience may have taught him its vanities and its follies. We do not despise the world that we may shun its duties, for these are indispensable while the pulse of man performs its office: we do not despise the world from weariness of life, or capriciousness of temper, for these are inadequate and reprehensible motives; we do not despise it from disgust at not having, in so many years, attained more of its riches, or its pleasures, for we must know that when the spark of life is nearly extinguished, neither riches nor pleasures have any intrinsic value; but we despise it for a reason that, at every period of man's life, must have considerable weight, because it would seduce us from the path of the divine life, and frustrate the happiest of all views, *the Christian's views of eternity*.—Too long have we lingered, not only where we could find no profit, but where we lost the little good that had been rescued from the fall; too long have we been entangled in troublesome and heavy fetters—let us burst our bands, and fly to heaven.

MEDI-

MEDITATION VII.

On the true Occupation of Time.

Had I the choice of sublunary good,
What could I wish that I possess not here?
Health, leisure, means t'improve it, friendship, peace,
And *constant occupation* without care.

COWPER.

MED. VII.

THE fabulous story of the Sybil's books affords an instructive allusion to the value of human life, as it draws towards its termination. Tare successive pages from the volume of time, and enquire of the contemplative man the price of what remains. He who computes his days by the duties which he is called upon to fulfil, and the perpetual impediments which the best intentioned meet with to obstruct the usefulness of their endeavours, can alone be sensible of their real value.

In

MED. VII.

In early life we lay long plans of conduct. After a considerable interval, we find most of our plans unexecuted, we then begin to reflect that if they *are* to be accomplished, a far smaller portion of our time than we had originally allotted to them, can be employed in their execution; and, what is perhaps more fatal to our schemes, that portion is uncertain. An awful thought! for those who have in their possession many of the chief blessings of life, and are approaching by a rapid progress that mortal *bourne from whence no traveller returns.*

Health, leisure, competence of means, the sweets of friendship, and the love of peace, are indeed valuable *possessions.* But they are also *trusts*, which rest not in the sensible pleasures which they bring, but extend to those promised joys which they are the means of acquiring. Under the protection of these, what may not man perform? *Without them*, much has been done, even by "the weary and heavy laden." *With them*, greater things may be expected; and if disappointment follow, there is generally reason to imagine that it arises, not from the circumstance

MED. VII. cumstance of situation, but from the misapplication of the talent.

Constant occupation, perpetual engagement in the active scenes of life, continued and unwearied attention to the important duties of his station, form at once the happiness of man, and the test of his obedience.

Human arrangements indeed must be made, because human purposes demand them. The world must be conducted according to the order of Providence. Men must be found to fill temporal offices, whose duty it is to endeavour to bring to a prosperous issue, such lawful trusts as are committed to their charge. In the *world*, we are not ministring *spirits*, but energetic and accountable *men*. But while we esteem ourselves beings of a material kind, of strong and effective abilities, we are not to forget our *two-fold* nature. We were born to live in another world, as well as this: and if we neglect, disgrace, or endanger our spiritual part, our temporal state of existence, will not only have been no blessing to us, but the fatal cause of an everlasting regret.

The intent of this observation is to shew, that,

that, though necessarily engaged in temporal occupations, the golden thread of an heavenly temper ought to run through them all. Sanctified by Divine Grace, every lawful engagement has its value. Nay, so very necessary to the real happiness of man is the principle of vital religion, and, as conducive to that, the cultivation of useful and agreeable temporal avocations, that if we draw aside the veil which conceals the characters of good men in eminent public stations, we shall find these *united friends* affording the purest satisfaction to their most rational, and most retired hours. MED. VII.

He, whose mind the *world wholly* occupies, imagines that no time can be spared for divine duties. But many circumstances in the lives of good men inform him that he is mistaken. The wise statesman, the sound lawyer, the eminent merchant, the skilful physician, the most profound mathematician, astronomer, or general student of almost any description, will rise up in judgment against the man who endeavours to excuse the observance of his religious duties, under the plea of learned or professional employment. Addison, Hale, Thornton, Boerhaave,

MED. VII. haave, Bacon, Boyle, Newton, Locke; themselves an host (omitting many modern names, well known in the record of the righteous) are ready to offer full proof, that while the most important of worldly studies and occupations employed their outward attention, *God rested at their hearts.* The Ethiopian treasurer read Isaiah *in his chariot*, Isaac meditated *in the fields.* The friends of good Hooker, when they went to visit him at his parsonage, found him with a book in his hand *tending his own sheep.* In short, the true Christian will neither want place nor opportunity for devotion, nor for the cultivation of those useful and general talents which may contribute to the benefit or happiness of man.

I may accommodate to this observation the remark of a learned judge in his history of the life and character of another eminent person who had occupied a situation of life similar to his own. "The professional oc-" cupations of the best employed lawyer, or "the most distinguished judge," says Lord Woodhouselee*, "cannot fill up every in-

* Life of Lord Kames, vol. i. p. 17.

" terval

" terval of his time. The useful respite of MED. VII.
" vacation, the hours of sickness, *the sur-*
" *cease of employment from the infirmities of*
" *age*, all necessarily induce seasons of lan-
" guor, against which a wise man would do
" well to provide a store in reserve, and an
" antidote and cordial to cheer and support
" his spirits. In this light the pursuits of
" science and of literature [and surely I may
" add, above all, the study of theology in
" its pure and genuine sense] afford an un-
" bounded field, and endless variety of use-
" ful occupations: and even in the latest
" hours of life, the reflection on the time
" thus spent, and the anticipation of an ho-
" nourable memorial in after ages [or rather
in the case of a truly religious conversation,
the confidence of hope—] " are sources of
" consolation, of which every ingenuous
" [every pious] mind must fully feel the
" value. How melancholy was the reflec-
" tion uttered on his death-bed, by one of
" the ablest lawyers and judges of the last
" age, but whose mental stores were wholly
" limited to the ideas connected with his
" profession, ' My life has been a chaos of
" nothing !' "

As

MED VII

As I have taken this reflection from the bench, which is equally applicable to men of all professions, from the same learned quarter, I shall select the diary of a most eminent, excellent, and pious, judge of a former age; and if we should be inclined to contrast it with the dying exclamation just recited, I trust that there is not an old man of sound intellect and good understanding who shall peruse it, but will fortify and improve his own mind by the comparison.

MORNING.

I. To lift up my heart to God in thankfulness for renewing my life.

II. To renew my covenant with God in Christ. 1. By renewed acts of faith receiving Christ, and rejoicing in the height of that relation. 2. Resolution of being one of his people, doing him allegiance.

III. Adoration and prayer.

IV. Setting a watch over my own infirmities and passions; over the snares laid in our way.—*Perimus licitis.*

DAY

MED. VII.

DAY EMPLOYMENT.

There must be an employment: two kinds.

I. Our ordinary calling—to serve God in it. It is a service to Christ, though never so mean. Coloss. iii. Here, FAITHFULNESS — DILIGENCE — CHEARFULNESS. Not to overlay myself with more business than I can bear.

II. Our spiritual employments: mingle somewhat of God's immediate service in this day.

REFRESHMENTS.

I. Meat and drink—moderation, seasoned with somewhat of God.

II. Recreations. 1. Not our business. 2. Suitable. No games, if given to covetousness or passion.

IF ALONE.

I. Beware of wandering, vain, lustful, thoughts; fly from thyself rather than entertain them.

II. Let

MED. VII.

II. Let thy solitary thoughts be profitable—view the evidences of thy salvation—the state of thy soul—the coming of Christ—thy own mortality; it will make thee humble and watchful.

COMPANY.

Do good to them—Use God's name reverently—Beware of leaving an ill impression of ill example—Receive good from them more knowing.

EVENING.

Cast up the accounts of the day—If aught be amiss, beg pardon—Gather resolution of more vigilance—If well, bless the mercy and grace of God that hath supported thee.

After this specimen of Sir Matthew Hale's private thoughts and resolutions, we shall not be surprised to be informed by his biographer, Bishop Burnet, that "his "whole life was nothing else, but a conti- "nual course of labour and industry; and "when he could borrow any time from the "public service, it was wholly employed, "either

MED. VII.

" either in philosophical or divine medita-
" tions.—" He that considers the active
" part of his life," he adds, " and with
" what unwearied diligence and application
" of mind, he dispatched all men's business
" that came under his care, will wonder how
" he could find time for contemplation: he
" that considers again the various studies he
" passed through, and the many collections
" and observations he made, may as justly
" wonder how he could find any time for
" action. But no man can wonder at the
" exemplary piety and innocence of such a
" life so spent as this was, wherein, as he
" was careful to avoid every evil word, so it
" is manifest he never spent an idle day."

May the example of so good a man, stimulate my endeavours after greater degrees of improvement; and may I be enabled to *mingle somewhat of God's immediate service in the employment of every day!*

MED. VII.

NOTE—

Under the Title of "RELIGIOUS ARITHMETIC," *the pious* MR. HOWE *presents us with a striking Meditation.*

No. XXXIII. "Most men are ready enough to "reckon up the income of their estates, and to compute "how it will answer their several expences; but few em- "ploy their arithmetic to calculate the value and income "of their life and time, or consider how they may be ex- "pended to the best advantage. In these the beggar has "as large a revenue as the king, though they are justly ac- "counted the more valuable treasure. The gracious God "has distributed equal portions of these to all degrees and "conditions of men, though not to every particular man "the same proportion; and the sum total of this is three- "score and ten years, all beyond that being labour and "sorrow; and many years also on this side of it. Now "we have to consider how much of this is likely to be "spent in happiness and enjoyment, and how much will "be employed to less pleasing purposes; which may be "thus easily computed: twenty years may be deducted for "education, which is a time of discipline and restraint, "and young people are never easy till they are got over "it; and the last ten years of the seventy may be de- "ducted for sickness and infirmities, which very often is "the portion of those years; so that these thirty taken out "of life, there remain but forty; out of which a third "part, being at least eight hours in the four-and-twenty, "which amounts to about fourteen years more, must be "deducted

" deducted for sleep, that sister and image of death; and MED. VII.
" then there remain but twenty-six; out of which, when
" the requisite allowances are taken for the time we are
" made uneasy with our own passions, and tormented with
" other people's; for what passes in sickness, pain, loss,
" and affliction, what we consume in anxiety for things
" that must inevitably happen, and what in anguish for
" accidents irrecoverably past; what passes in stupid and
" insipid amusements, or brown studies, without either
" trouble or pleasure; when this is summed up, the poor
" inconsiderable remainder, I doubt, we shall not account
" much better for; it being generally unprofitably wasted
" in vice and vanity."—Whatever computation any man may make of the *occupation of his time*, too much will be found distributed in the above proportions. Take away unnecessary sleep, *sleep*, that does not renovate but destroy; banish pernicious amusements, whose tendency is only to produce a total dissipation of thought; deceive not yourselves with pretended business, whose multiplicity only distracts; nor forced pleasures, which are merely pains in disguise: thus will much time be gained for every useful and important purpose, for the glory of God, and the benefit and safety of your souls.

MEDITATION VIII.

On the Advantages of Increasing Years.

By *day*, the soul, o'erborne by life's career,
Stunn'd by the din, and giddy with the glare,
Reels far from reason, jostled by the throng—
By *night*, from objects free, from passions cool,
Thoughts, uncontroul'd and unimpress'd—
Not to the limits of *one* world confin'd
But from *etherial* travels lights on earth.

YOUNG.

MED. VIII.

EVERY man feels within his own breast a great disparity of judgment concerning his own condition, as his passions ebb and flow, as his health is sounder, his spirits lighter, or even as external objects impress themselves on his fancy. This variety in the frame and texture of the body, often leads to great delusion of thought. This therefore, becomes an object of correction to the man of serious contemplation.

contemplation. To bring his mind to an even balance, by renouncing the wild rovings of imagination on the one hand, and inviting and cherishing with his tenderest care the pure and unadulterated blessings of heaven on the other, will completely effect this most beneficial purpose of his soul.

The bright visions of the *day*, succeeded by the meditation of *sober evening*, resemble the calm tranquillity of advancing years, after the thoughtless gaiety, and too often inexperienced folly of youth. *Stunned by the din* of an overpowering world, dazzled by the *glare* of vanity, and *giddy* with the height to which proud ambition, or great commercial riches, had led him, the man of maturer age begins to feel the sickness of his soul. Reason, that original beam of human wisdom, is no longer visible to his eye. He has been pushed from her society by an inebriated throng of worldly avocations; and, what is a more melancholy consideration, he has been long callous to his loss. But the moment has arrived when an happy change may be expected. At that hour when the sun of his life has passed its meridian, and is verging towards an evening sky, when the myriads that swarmed by day have rested from their laborious

MED. VIII.

laborious trifling, the dark approaching cloud reminds him that, yet a few more moments, and the day will close for ever. This reflection rouses the long-forgotten *thought*. He rests under some shady *roof*, and free from every object that could mislead his senses, cool in his passions, but warm with religious fervour, he "commerces with the skies."—When he *lights on earth* after his *etherial travels*, what may we then imagine will be the result? Condemnation of his former misspent hours—resolutions, on firmer ground, of future improvement—and renovation, on sound principles, of the whole spirit and temper of his mind. *The limits of one world* no longer bound his thoughts. He springs forward on holy wings, and *by faith beholds Him who is invisible*.

The impression, which such a character leaves upon the mind, produces a conviction of this truth, that *there is an advantage in increasing years*.

But while this period is yet in prospect, how dreadful is its anticipation in numerous instances! And to many, when it does arrive, with what circumstances of aggravation is it attended!—"Tell me not," I hear one exclaim,

exclaim, "Tell me not of the comforts of "old age, when I have for ever lost the elas- "ticity of youth."—"Hide from me," says another, "the sight of wrinkles; shadow "from me infirmities and disease."—"Speak "not one word of consolation," says a third, "to him who must for ever rest upon his bed; "who has reason to cry out at night, would "God it were morning! and in the morn- "ing, so oppressive are his sorrows, that he "continues his complaint, would God it "were evening!"— MED. VIII.

Sufficient, doubtless, to *that* day, is the evil thereof. Natural infirmities must have their course; but what an addition is given to their weight, when they are aggravated by a restless, or an irreligious mind. Even the wise Preacher in referring to the decline of life calls those days *evil*, and directs our attention to *those years* when a man shall say, "I have no pleasure in them;"—when *the sun, and the light, and the moon, shall be darkened, and the clouds return after the rain:* when the keepers of the house *shall tremble, and the strong men shall bow themselves, and the grinders cease because they are few, and those that look out of the windows be darkened,*

when

MED. VIII.

when all the animal faculties are in a state of decay, the head and the hand trembling, the teeth and the eyes failing; when *the doors shall be shut in the streets*, and a sort of natural solitude shall arise; *when the sound of the grinding is low*, and the chearfulness of plenty can be neither heard, or used: *when he shall rise up at the sound of the bird*, the harbinger of morning, for want of sound and refreshing sleep: *when the daughters of music shall be brought low*, and all external harmony shall cease: also, when they shall be agitated with groundless and unnecessary apprehensions, for *they shall be afraid of that which is high, and fears shall be in the way;* and the almond tree shall *flourish, and the grasshopper shall be a burden*, things in themselves even pleasant and agreeable, shall not only no longer have the power to please, but shall become a grievous and insupportable burthen, for *desire* itself *shall fail.*—This striking delineation of the decay of the natural faculties of man, claims his particular attention at its approach; at that interesting period, when his perception is yet sound, and his reason is yet entire—" or ever," as the eloquent preacher further expresses it, " the

" silver

" silver cord be loosed, or the golden bowl be " broken, or the pitcher be broken at the " fountain, or the wheel be broken at the " cistern *."

MED. VIII.

If we contemplate the season of winter with all its sweeping clouds and showers, if we view the mountain covered with snow, the river arrested in its course with bitter frosts, and hear the howling of the tempest, at the first motion of the mind, horror and despair seem ready to overwhelm us. How can man exist under such a tumult of the elements? We have enjoyed the fragrant flowers of the spring, we have reposed under a cool shade beneath a summer's sun, and have been joyful partakers of Nature's bounty in the autumn. But winter, what can we do with a long and dreary winter? Our verdant fields are become brown; the gay leaf is withered and is gone; the sun-beam has lost its heat, and brooding storms darken and deform the sky. True; all this has happened. But has God left one season without its peculiar comforts? Has a merciful God left his rational creatures without a plentiful sup-

* Eccl. xii.

ply

MED. VIII.

ply of necessaries for all temporal wants, and much more, of infinite resources for every spiritual desire? The storm rages without—but beneath the shelter of his own habitation, there is, for every *good man*, an happy home within. At least, God has brought his blessings to his fire-side: and if his duty be not at variance with his inclination, he may find them there.

The transition of thought from the seasons of the year to the varying stages of human life, though too apparent to be overlooked, is too trite to be repeated. But when we can divest ourselves of the commonness of the allusion, it would be worth our while to pause a moment, and contemplate it.

The consequence of such contemplation is a conviction that neither man, nor the earth which he inhabits, are in the same state which they were, when they came first from the hands of their Creator. Man's rational faculties will inform him, that the violence of his passions, and the many external and internal troubles of his mortal frame, are as contrary to what might have been expected from the enjoyments of an innocent being, as the earthquake and volcano, the storm or the

the tempest are, to the tranquillity of the material world. Both, therefore, he may well imagine, have been agitated, both *disarranged* by some important cause. But the brightest of man's rational faculties never could discover that cause, without the assistance of that Holy Spirit, which *searches all things; yea, the deep things of God* *. MED. VIII.

Turn then to the earliest part of the earliest, and only authentic, record of the History of Man. See the miseries of disobedience; the taint of sin; *the origin of evil.*—By *man* came death; and all the dismal train of infirmities and diseases, the precursors of it. By the *same man* the salubrity of the very heavens was corrupted; and the place of his habitation partook of the transgression of its master. Whoever dares to discredit this great truth, must shut his eyes on the atmosphere which surrounds him; he must do more, he must pluck from his own bosom the thorns and thistles sown there by an adversary, whom every day, and every hour, call upon him most strenuously to resist.

* 1 Cor. ii. 10.

But

MED. VIII.

But man was never left without a comforter. Our first father was compelled by natural necessity, or rather by the injunction of an indulgent Providence, both as a punishment for his fault, and a relief to his bodily wants, to cultivate the earth from whence he was taken ; and we may suppose that he soon brought the habitable part of it to a degree of fruitfulness and fertility. His family were instructed in the same pursuits. Abel was a keeper of sheep, and Cain a tiller of the ground. His spiritual part, we have reason to imagine, underwent a still more important cultivation. The divine promise of the *seed of the woman* *, no doubt, planted within his breast the motive of renovation. *By faith Abel offered an acceptable sacrifice* †. This faith was the faith of Adam, and there can be no doubt but that this faith became the strength of his life, and the comforter of his declining years. The same topic of consolation descended, with increasing benefit, through a long succession of venerable patriarchs and holy prophets. "Abraham," says

* Gen. iii. 15. † Heb xi. 4.

our

our blessed Lord, "rejoiced to see my day, "and he saw it, and was glad *." Isaac and Jacob experienced, by immediate revelation, the same blessing: and many a faithful Jew, through an interval of many ages, went down to his grave rejoicing that he also had seen the *Lord's Christ*. MED. VIII.

What apology then can we make, after a contemplation of the completion of this great scheme of human redemption, if we do not accept it, honestly and freely, as the foundation of happiness; and so much the more as we see the day of our death approaching?

The inevitable infirmities of man, the Christian considers as the penalty of nature, and acquiesces in the just dispensation of Providence. But the conquest which he has been enabled to make, through grace, of the evil propensities of early life, and the encroaching inclinations of maturer years, leaves his mind, at the appearance of old age, in possession of that tranquillity which will more than recompence the loss of youth, and of that full assurance of faith and holy expectation, which open to him the more reviving, and ever refreshing prospect, of *new*

* John viii. 56.

heavens

MED. VIII.

heavens and a new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness.

May that tranquillity, and that peace be mine! Let me not rest on the inconveniencies, but on the advantages, of increasing years; then shall I perceive that the *Christian temper* is the securest passport to temporal, as well as to eternal happiness!

MEDITATION IX.

On the Advantages of Increasing Years.

'Tis the great art of life, to manage well
The restless mind—

ARMSTRONG.

RELIGION teaches us that life is a spiritual conflict: a truth which is confirmed by every day's experience. But religion goes one step further, and acquaints us, that it is not an hopeless conflict in which we are engaged. It provides for us spiritual weapons and spiritual armour, and assures us that we are placed under spiritual protection. This contest begins, even before reason has combined her powers of understanding, and ends not till we have obtained the victory in death. MED. IX.

Our inquiry then is, in what period of our lives this warfare is the strongest? We hesitate

MED. IX. tate not to reply, *in youth*. And we need hardly give a reason for our answer; as it is generally known that our passions are then most irregular and lively, and consequently that resistance will be then most feeble. What then, under these circumstances, is expected from the skilful combatant? He must make himself master of the *first fortress*, which will open the way to his future conquests, and tend finally to put him in possession of the enemy's country. This figure of writing is often used by the Apostles, and none of us, after examination and an experience of our whole lives, will conclude, when thus applied, that it is too strong.

If this conquest be early attained, what a succession of happy years will follow! That *change of heart* which is indispensable under the Christian covenant will be established; and though watchfulness be always necessary, the danger will be less. To curb the *restless mind*, under the various allurements to which it is exposed, to regulate its direction in the several intricate situations which occur in human life, is the great secret of human happiness. These situations are of a two-fold nature—as they respect *the passions*, which

which become good or bad, according to their use; and as they respect *the changes* which take place in the animal frame from the natural decays of time. If we check all evil propensities in the first instance, and admit only as our bosom companions, those inclinations which offer a sure evidence of their divine original, we shall be the more easily induced, not only to tolerate, but to welcome and improve, the *latter*. MED. IX.

He who perceives the approach of debility and disease, of the failing eye, the shaking hand and tottering frame; he who feels sharp pain and oppressive sickness; who rests not but by the aid of medicine, and moves not but by another's limbs; is ill calculated to resist such powerful monitors, unless his mind have been previously instructed in the only school where true wisdom can be taught. The *school of Christ* offers this advantage to every member of its sacred institution, that it gives comfort where it does not give strength, and that its "strength is made perfect in "weakness."—"Most gladly, "therefore," says the intrepid Paul, "will "I rather glory in my infirmities, that the

MED. IX. " power of Christ may rest upon me*." Nay, so spiritual was the Apostle's mind become, by improving all his sufferings as they arose, that they seemed not only to make *no* impression on him in adding to his personal distresses, but to afford him a degree of positive satisfaction.—" Therefore," he says, " I *take pleasure* in infirmities—for when I " am weak, then am I strong†."

It may be said, perhaps, that with respect to suffering, something must be attributed to natural disposition. Undoubtedly the gifts of nature are various. There is a sensible difference in the irritability of the human frame. But we are not to rest our moral conduct upon our animal sensation. The gifts of grace are equally various, and distribute themselves, according to God's good pleasure, so as to meet the various exigencies which are required. If pain, sickness, languor, dejection, arrange themselves on one side, patience, fortitude, hope, confidence, are ready to meet them on the other. Nor are these, like the moral remedies of the

* 2 Cor. xii. 9. † 2 Cor. xii. 10.

Stoics;

Stoics; *abstract principles*, offering only rational arguments to meet inevitable evils; but they possess a spiritual unction, uniting the sufferings of the man to the love of God, proposing motives which must satisfy the mind of the believer, representing them as the consequences of *sin*, and therefore, though not the *cause*, yet, through grace, the means of salvation. "Wherefore then," exclaims the pious prophet—"wherefore should a "living man complain, a man for the punish-"ment of his sin*!" MED. IX.

In the midst of these reflections, youth may object, "I feel none of those evils "which you describe. Sound health of "body, and an easy temperament of mind, "incline me to the full enjoyment of that "state of life in which Providence hath "placed me. I renounce vice, and I love "religion. Why should I anticipate a sea-"son which may not arrive? Or why should "I imagine that such advantages are pecu-"liar to *increasing* years?"—So far as thou enjoyest thy youth in conformity to the will of God, thou dost well. Thy Maker ap-

* Lam. iii. 39.

MED. IX.

proves thy choice, and thy personal happiness is a proof that thy reward is with thee. But if thou shouldst linger but a few years longer than thou expectest; if thou shouldst fall among *perils by land*, or *perils by water*; or if thou shouldst be a partaker of those dangers which perpetually occur *in the city*, or in *the country*, or among *false brethren*: if the fever's rage, or consumption's slowly increasing taint should visit thee; or if, at a still later period, some more dreadful shock should agitate and paralyze thy frame, wouldst thou then retain that sweetness of disposition, and complacency of conduct, which rendered thee amiable in youth? Alas! my young friend! thou dost not feel the change, and therefore thou dost not fear the consequences: but, believe me, it requires a faith as strong as Paul's to retain those attractive gifts of heaven, under the weakness of age and the painful and oppressive feelings of inveterate disease. Think not, then, that I urge thee *too soon* to anticipate the evils of old age. Treasure cannot accumulate, if it never be laid up. *Rejoice, therefore, O young man! in thy youth*, but let thy rejoicing be tempered with discretion. Let the prospect of those

MED. IX.

those years appear before thee, which, perhaps, it may never be allowed thee to attain; but if thou dost attain them, thou wilt think every moment spent to advantage, which brought them *so early* to thy sight.—

The open, generous, breast of youth has few conceptions of its danger in the progress of life. If the young be not crushed, like the Indian, beneath the chariot-wheels of their own idol, a cold unfeeling sentiment too frequently clings about their heart. The maxims of an interested policy, the examples and expectations of a worldly spirit, congeal the pure effusions of their more early years. The sweet tempered youth becomes the morose, or the insidious man. Instead of feeling the improvements of advancing life, each day brings its labours and its troubles, its cares and its vexations, its failings and its vices. Dissatisfaction and uneasiness mark their progress, till the arrival of the last hour, which, though long expected, none, under these circumstances, are happy to receive.

Perhaps it may be thought, that this colouring is *too strong*. But let us inquire its truth: let us call forth our observation; and

then

MED. IX.

then we shall remark, how rarely the amiableness, so visible in youth, is protracted to old age!—Amiableness, indeed, in the softer sense, is a characteristic of conduct, too general to be attributed equally to every period of life. But to those who study the gradual movements of time upon sound religious principle, it assumes a new and bolder aspect: it matures to consistency; and the riper judgment, thus aided and assisted, is able to distinguish what it should embrace, and what it should reject. If the possessor of this naturally good disposition be so happy as to retain the substance, while he conquers the weaknesses, of this lovely quality of mind, he forms a manly character on pure and solid grounds, in the high meridian of his days; and as time proceeds further with him, he obtains increasing advantages from the very circumstance of age itself. Declining himself every day from the light of the sun, he endeavours to make its beams shine brighter on those who are to succeed him. He communicates the warm feelings of his breast to those who reverence his virtues. The generous youth is converted into the venerated

sage:—" the hoary head is a crown of glory, MED. IX.
" when it is found in the way of righteous-
" ness *."

Who will not acknowledge, then, that there is an advantage in increasing years? Who will not stand self-condemned, who does not endeavour to acquire those most valuable benefits which a long experience of human life can give him? Who that has felt the tumult of a *restless mind*, will not bless the calm tranquillity of age, when that tranquillity arises from the purest conception of religious faith? Is there no comfort in subdued affections, repressed passions, conquered vices? Is there no satisfaction in having *put off the old man with his deeds, and having put on the new man which is renewed after the image of Him that created him* †? Is there nothing in being in possession of a *spiritual mind*, in having assurance that *all things work together for good to those that love God*, in considering the place of our present existence merely as a temporary residence, and in having our hearts fixed with our treasures, in *an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens?*

* Prov. xvi. 31. † Col. iii. 10.

—Oh!

MED. IX. —Oh! yes. Impressed with a lively and a saving faith, we must answer that "*there* "*is*:"—and blessed, thrice blessed, are they that can confirm the happy feeling!

"Among men of the world," says a pious author, "a youth of softness and sweetness "will often harden into insensibility, and "sharpen into moroseness. But, it is the "office of Christianity to reverse this order. "It is pleasing to witness this blessed reno- "vation: to see, as life advances, asperities "gradually smoothing down, and rough- "nesses mellowing away; while the subject "of this happy change experiences within "increasing measures of comfort, which he "diffuses around him; and feeling the ge- "nial influences of that heavenly flame "which can thus give life, and warmth, and "action to what had been hitherto rigid and "insensible, looks up with gratitude to him "who has shed abroad this principle of love "in his heart;

"Miraturque novas frondes, et non sua poma*."

Is this description a *test* of my own feelings? If it is not, it ought to be. I have

* Wilberforce's View of Religion, p. 271.

seen

seen changes in others, and shall be happy to experience such a change in myself. Almighty God! soften in me the ruggedness and severity of increasing age; and grant that, whilst I inquire "Who hath known "the mind of the Lord that he may in- "struct him?" I may be ready to reply in the language of St. Paul—"But I have *the* "*mind of Christ* *."

MED. IX.

* 1 Cor. ii. 16.

MEDI-

MEDITATION X.

The State of Old Age venerable.

To make the passage easy, safe, and plain,
That leads us to this *venerable state.*

FAIRFAX.

MED. X.

THE vestibule of a temple ought in every respect to correspond with the beauty and architecture of the structure to which it is attached, as well as to the end and design of its construction. As no building, disfigured in its proportions, or injudicious in the arrangement of its parts, can bear the examination of the critical eye, so no state or condition of life, discordant in the purity of its principles, or inharmonious in its conduct, is entitled to the unqualified approbation of the moralist. The *whole* is the great, and only, object of attention. The perfection of the *whole*, therefore, ought to be the aim both of the

the temporal, and spiritual, builder. Perhaps, after all our endeavours, *both* the edifices may be left imperfect; but in the latter case, the prospect of perfection is not without hope, for he who builds for eternity is promised the assistance of an eternal Architect. MED. X.

The state of old age, grave and venerable by nature, ought not to be disfigured by the previous imputation of guilt, or by an obstinate perseverance even in venial offences. The stain of sin is indeed inalienable from the condition of human nature; but wilful and deliberate sin, every often repeated sin, every sin committed against conviction, infallibly and effectually removes all *veneration* for a character, however distinguished by age, or celebrated by ability.

Christianity indeed restores us to a state where no penalty will be exacted. But it cannot undo what has been already done. And although extreme penitence, on the pure motives of Gospel-righteousness, will necessarily excite respect, I do not exactly know that it will always produce *veneration*. We are, in this argument, to provide for every

MED. X.

every feeling of the human mind; and though some may be inclined to call this a distinction without a difference, yet I will venture to pronounce that the observation is founded in nature. I would not, however, by this remark throw any damp on the exertions of an old man under these circumstances, or detract from that superior praise which is due to *him that overcometh*. If he be a *real Christian*, he will himself qualify the expression: and the reflection on this distinction will be a strong motive with one of earlier years, not to compromise a character of reverend estimation in the decline of life, for any actual, or even doubtful, levity of conduct, previous to its approach.

The beautiful parable of the Prodigal will perhaps illustrate this opinion. The father rejoices with unfeigned joy at the return of a repentant child.—"Bring forth the fatted "calf, and kill it, and let us eat and be "merry; for this my son was dead, and is "alive again, and was lost, and is found: "and they began to be merry." His other son, of grave character and inoffensive manners, remonstrates. The father replies, "Son!

" Son ! thou art ever with me, and all that " I have is thine *." MED. X.

Old age, then, in the abstract consideration, *is* venerable ; and this character of advanced years should be an object of emulation in every preceding period of life. Anxiety to attain old age, indeed, forms no part of the Christian's wish ; for absolute acquiescence in the will of Providence is a general duty. But if that time should arrive when we perceive our locks turn gray, and the feebleness of our frame admonishes us that the race of life is near its end, it will then be some consolation to reflect that we have had that period in our view, and that previous religious Meditation has prepared us for its reception.

If we compare the state of old age with its delineation in Scripture, we shall find much to sooth us even under its acknowledged deficiencies. The benevolent Creator of man never deprives him of one real or imagined good, without the introduction of another still more appropriate to his situation. " To " every thing," says Solomon, " there is a

* Luke xv.

" season,

MED. X. " season, and a time to every purpose under " heaven: a time to be born, and a time to " die: a time to plant, and a time to pluck " up that which is planted:—he hath made " every thing *beautiful in his time* *." Old age, then, we may be assured, he will not leave without those comfortable supports which are best able, not only to strengthen, but embellish it.

In the writings of the Prophets, how does the Almighty condescend to represent HIMSELF?—" I beheld till the thrones were " cast down," says Daniel in his vision, " and THE ANCIENT OF DAYS did sit, " whose garment was white as snow, and the " hairs of his head like pure wool †." And in the book of the revelation of St. John, the Son of man is described as " clothed " with a garment down to the foot, and " girt about the paps with a golden girdle: " his head and his hairs were white like " wool, as white as snow ‡."—" As God is, " eternal, immortal, invisible §," as Jesus Christ is " the same yesterday, and to-day,

* Eccl. iii. 1.
† Dan. vii. 9.
‡ Rev. i. 13.
§ 1 Tim. i. 17.

" and

" and for ever *,"—we cannot attribute to either, length of days, or end of life. But we may truly imagine that a *veneration of character* is intended to be conveyed in such descriptions: and hence, a divine moral may be presented to all those whom Providence hath distinguished by an ordinary, or an extraordinary, prolongation of years.—" Be " ye perfect, even *as your Father which is in* " *heaven* is perfect †."

MED. X.

The fine picture of Abraham, when he " gave up the ghost, and died in a good " old age, an old man and full of years ‡;" the interesting, but more debilitated figure of Isaac, when he was " old, and his eyes were " dim, so that he could not see;" and further, the venerable Jacob, when he was " a " dying, blessing the two sons of Joseph, " and worshipping, leaning upon the top of " his staff ||;" present such images of far advanced life as must convince us that, though *labour and sorrow* be the portion of man's inheritance, a pure faith will conquer temporary evil, and the near prospect of an happy

* Heb. xiii. 18.
† Matt. v. 48.
‡ Gen. xxv. 8.
|| Heb. xi. 21.

eternity

MED. X.

eternity give life and animation to the feeblest breast.

How graceful is the figure of Jacob, how interesting and affecting the interview, when Joseph is represented as bringing in his aged parent, and setting him before Pharaoh !— "And Jacob *blessed* Pharaoh. And Pharaoh "said unto Jacob, How old art thou? And "Jacob said unto Pharaoh, The days of the "years of my pilgrimage are an hundred and "thirty years; few and evil have the days "of the years of my life been, and have not "attained unto the days of the years of the "life of my fathers in the days of their pil-"grimage. And Jacob *blessed* Pharaoh, "and went out from before Pharaoh *."—The *blessing* of the Patriarch at his introduction, and at his leaving the presence of the King, are beautiful traits in the character of a pious, and a good, old man. The account of his life too is appropriate, and just. He does not intend to make any complaint, or to shew the least symptom of discontent. He simply states that old as he was, Providence had given a longer date to his forefathers, the

* Gen. xlvii. 7.

two

two last of whom were highly celebrated in their day; that he considered his passage through life a pilgrimage like theirs, and that, like them, and the rest of his fellow-creatures, he had found it but a weary journey, attended often with trouble, often with pain: yet as it was *only* a pilgrimage, he trusted that God, in his own good time, would bring him to a peaceful end.— MED. X.

Spenser's old man, though represented in obsolete language, is no unworthy partner of good old Jacob.

> " Selfe have I worne out thrice thirty yeares,
> " Some in much joy, many in many teares:
> " Yet never complained of cold nor heate,
> " Of sommer flame, nor winter's threate:
> " Ne never was to fortune foe-man,
> " But *gently took, that ungently came.*" Ecl. ii.

Though an early death, to one whose high sense of religion has prepared him for it, may be considered as a favour bestowed by a righteous and an holy God, yet length of days, accompanied by that which can only render length of days happy, is expressly considered by the Almighty himself as a distinguished blessing. *To live long in the land*

MED. X.

is a promise annexed to a precept. Its application was particularly directed to the Israelites in the land of promise: and as the moral law was established, not abrogated like the ceremonial law by the coming of Christ, we have reason to believe that its benefits are yet in the earth. After the restoration of Jerusalem, when the Lord is promising happiness to her inhabitants, the prophet Zechariah says, "Thus saith the Lord of Hosts, There "shall yet old men and old women dwell in "the streets of Jerusalem, and every man "with his staff in his hand for very age *." "Hearken unto me, O house of Jacob," says Isaiah, "even to your old age I am he, "and even to hoary hairs will I carry you †." And when God punished the supineness of Eli, for the unrestrained licentiousness of his sons, he informed him, that there should not be "an old man in his house for ever ‡."—Let the Almighty then judge of the value of his own favours: and let us, humbly and thankfully, enjoy, and venerate his gifts.

In paying reverence to age, there is a considerable mixture of piety to God, for it is

* Zech. viii. 4. † Is. xlvi. 4. ‡ 1 Sam. ii. 31.

in

in consideration of the *spiritual mind* of an old man, that we are induced to attach a veneration for his character. The law of Moses itself was sufficiently explicit upon this subject.—"Thou shalt rise up before the "hoary head, and honour the face of the "old man, and fear thy God, I am the "Lord *." Neither is the New Testament wanting in the expression of affection. "For "love's sake," says St. Paul, "I beseech "you, being such an one as St. Paul *the* "*aged* †. And whosoever reflects upon the "old age of St. John the Evangelist, dis-"pensing kind wishes and prayers from his "chair, when he could no longer address his "beloved children in the faith from the seat "of public instruction, will feel the reason "why the word *Presbyter* or *Elder*, when "attributed to a spiritual friend and revered "pastor, comprehends within its meaning "every thing that is kind, tender, warm, "and beneficial to the human mind. He "will then also be fully satisfied that nothing "but the actual possession of true religion "can render youth amiable, manhood useful, "or old age *venerable*."

MED. X.

* Lev. xix. 32. † Phil. ver. 9.

MED. X.

On this state, O my God! let me bend mine eye; not with an anxious, or a *worldly* longing after protracted life, but with an holy intention of fulfilling the appropriate duties which I now contemplate, that when I descend to the tomb of my fathers, I may find that "*rest which remaineth to the people* "*of God* *."

* Heb. iv. 9.

MEDI-

MEDITATION XI.

The Old Man in Society.

Though old, he still retain'd
His manly sense, and energy of mind.
Virtuous and wise he was, but not severe;
He still remembered that he once was young;
His easy presence checked no decent joy.
Him, e'en the dissolute admired, for he
A graceful freeness when he pleased put on
And laughing, could instruct; he studied from the life,
And in th' original perus'd mankind.

ARMSTRONG.

MED. XI.

TO keep our friendships in repair, according to the advice of the sage Dr. Johnson, and to endeavour to grow old *gracefully*, are maxims of considerable importance to an old man, as a member of public society. In the common course of nature, friends, kinsmen, and acquaintance, must leave us in the middle period of life. Faces, which have been long of much interest to us, will be no longer visible:

MED. XI.

visible: and hearts, that have often warmly and affectionately sympathized with our own, will sympathize with us no more. But *the world still continues:* and we continue to occupy our station in it. We regret, but cannot recall. "I shall go to him, but he shall "not return to me." The reflection is sorrowful, but it is not without consolation.

The placid resignation of an old man, deprived indeed of many of the substantial comforts of his life, yet possessing in himself a confidence, not founded on the fragile nature of mortality, is an enviable condition. The trunk indeed suffers, but *the man* survives; the world recedes, but *heaven is in view.*

Hope and fear have each their periods in the history of man's life. In youth and middle age we are sanguine and fear nothing: in our advanced years, sensible that we have lost something, we grow timorous, and are afraid of losing more. Something therefore remains to be corrected in both situations.—In one, we must check our impetuosity by reflecting that, in an uncertain life, old age may never come; in the other, we must cherish our resolution by the thought that, the more protracted the hour of our dissolution be,

be, the greater scope has a kind Providence allowed us for the exercise of those duties which our situation, as men and as Christians, demands. *To whom much is given, of him will much be required.* MED. XI.

The balancing of hope and fear, and the remedy for both, are admirably considered in a familiar letter from Dr. Young, at a very late period of his life, to his friend Richardson.—"There is great difference between "middle and old age. Hope is quartered on "the middle of life, and fear on the latter "end of it; and hope is ever inspiring plea- "sant dreams, and fear hideous ones. If "any good arises beyond our hope, we have "such a diffidence of its stay, that the appre- "hension of losing it, destroys the pleasure "of possessing it: it adds to our fears rather "than increases our joys. What shall we do "in this case? Help me to an expedient: "there is but one that I know of, which is, "that since the things of this life, from their "mixture, repetition, defectiveness, and, in "age, short duration, are unable to satisfy, "we must aid their *natural*, by a *moral* plea- "sure; we must season them with religion to "make them more palatable; we must con-

"sider

MED. XI.

"sider that it is God's will that we should be "content and pleased with them: and thus the "*thinness* of the natural pleasure, by our "sense of joining an *obedience to heaven* to it, "will become much more *substantial* and sa-"tisfactory.—We shall find great account in "considering content, not only as a prudence, "but as a *duty* too—Religion, he adds, is "all: (and happy for us!) it is all sufficient "too in our last extremities; a full proof of "which, I will steal from yourself. So all "sufficient is religion, that you could not "draw, in Clarissa, the strongest object of "pity, without giving us in it (thanks to her "religion) an object of *envy* too *."

Hope, triumphing over fear, by the assistance of religion, in the person of an aged man, affords a beautiful and an interesting subject for a picture. The old should view it with complacency; the young, with delight. And when we consider *that* aged man as the author of "Night Thoughts," our pleasure and veneration will increase; and we shall be assured that seriousness of meditation does not necessarily imply mo-

* Richardson's Correspondence, vol. ii. p. 12.

roseness

roseness of character, or gloominess of mind. We shall not even require the pen of David to delineate his feelings.—"Mark the perfect man, and behold the upright: for the end of that man is *peace* *." MED. XI.

But the old man, under such happy circumstances, possesses *joy*, as well as peace, in believing. "A chearful mind is a continual feast †"—it checks, as it were, even the decays of nature, corrects or soothes every infirmity as it approaches, and prolongs, not only the happiness, but the utility of its possessor. It affords too this peculiar advantage that, it does not seek to hide its sorrows or its infirmities in an impenetrable solitude, where a less easy temper would have driven him who had not meliorated or removed them by reflection, but that it is still able to mix with a society composed of qualities like its own, and to diffuse a genial warmth into kindred bosoms.

A misanthropic dislike of society in old age, indicates as much the absence of true religious principle, as the insatiable thirst after crowds and indiscrimate companions.—

* Ps. xxxvii. 37. † Prov. xv. 15.

Solitude,

MED. XI. Solitude, unsocial solitude, is the parent of innumerable diseases, mental as well as bodily diseases, in an old person. Miserable habits are acquired, not always innocent. Brooding over lost pleasures and enjoyments, disgusted with present possession, and having no stability in the expectation of futurity—what condition of life can be imagined more deplorable? But as *mind* is wanting, as there is no steady principle of conduct, no spiritual information, no spiritual feeling, we cannot expect, what so defective a character does not possess.

But he who has grown gray in his heavenly master's service, will find many advantages in well chosen society. I pass by the communication of his own valuable experience, the well-tempered results of his own mature judgment; as it is the effect of society upon *himself* rather than others, which is the object of my present consideration.

The good old man will not look for associates among the dissipated of any age. He will not wish to communicate freely even with those whose days are consumed in *trifling*, which, for that reason, may not

always be considered as *innocent*, avocations. He who starts back from decided vice, and as decided irreligion, will not willingly consume his time, and hazard his principles, among those whose conduct has more than a tendency to endanger both. "There is not, I think," says Cowper, (and he draws not his pencil too deeply along the picture) "there is not so "melancholy a sight in the world (an hos- "pital is not to be compared with it) as "that of a thousand persons, distinguished "by the name of gentry, who, gentle per- "haps, by nature, and made more gentle "by education, have the appearance of be- "ing innocent and inoffensive, yet being "destitute of all religion, or not governed "at all by the religion they profess, are "none of them at any distance from an "eternal state, where self-deception will be "impossible, and where amusements can- "not enter*."

Such a society as this can add no comfort to the breast of an old man; and miserable indeed are the effects on the morals

* Hayley's Life of Cowper, vol. i. p. 232.

and

MED. XI.

and principles of a young one. A few social friends of similar sentiments of piety and virtue, connected on terms of intercourse consistent with the pure motives of civil or religious duties, and of equal, or nearly equal, years, is indeed a most desirable circumstance, and must contribute in a high degree to the general happiness of life. But as a society of this nature must, at no distant period, dissolve itself, is it not reasonable so inquire, whether great and peculiar advantages would not arise from an occasional intercourse with persons inferior in age to themselves?

One of the failings of old age is to be prejudiced in opinion. The intercourse thus recommended would rub off the rust of years, and give an unexpected polish to the sound principles of youth.

This subject is so well treated by a late eminent physician, that I shall sum up the argument in his language rather than my own. "Many causes contribute to destroy "chearfulness in the decline of life, besides "the natural decay of youthful vivacity. "The few surviving friends and companions "are then dropping off apace; the gay pros-

"pects

" pects that swelled the imagination in more MED. XI.
" early, and more happy days, are then va-
" nished; and along with them the open,
" generous, and unsuspicious temper, and
" that warm heart which dilated with be-
" nevolence to all mankind. These are
" succeeded by gloom, disgust, suspicion,
" and all the selfish passions, which sour the
" temper and contract the heart. When
" old people associate only with one another,
" they mutually increase these unhappy dis-
" positions, by brooding over their disap-
" pointments, the degeneracy of the times,
" and such like chearless and uncomfortable
" subjects. The conversation of young peo-
" ple dispels this gloom, and communicates
" a chearfulness, and something else which
" perhaps we do not wholly understand, of
" great consequence to health and the pro-
" longation of life. There is an universal
" principle of imitation among mankind
" which disposes them to catch instan-
" taneously, and without being conscious
" of it, the resemblance of any action or
" character that presents itself. This dis-
" position we can often check by the force
" of reason, or the assistance of opposite

" im-

MED. XI.

" impressions: at other times it is insur-
" mountable. We have numberless exam-
" ples of this in the similitude of charac-
" ters and manners, induced by people
" living much together, in the sudden com-
" munications of terror, of melancholy, of
" joy, of the military ardour, when no
" cause can be assigned for these emotions.
" The communication of nervous disorders,
" especially of the convulsive kind, is often
" so astonishing, that it has been referred
" to fascination and witchcraft. We will
" not pretend to explain the nature of this
" mental infection; but it is a fact well esta-
" blished that such a thing exists, and
" that there is such a thing in nature as an
" healthy sympathy, as well as a morbid
" infection.

" An old man who enters into this phi-
" losophy [or as the author may be allowed to say, in addition to this ingenious philosophy—an old man, who is, besides, impressed with the certainty and feeling that the religion of Christ offers a chearfulness and placidity of mind beyond all other considerations] is " far from envying or prov-
" ing a check on the innocent pleasures of
" young

" young people, and particularly of his own MED. XI.
" children. On the contrary, he attends
" with delight to the gradual opening of the
" imagination and the dawn of reason; he
" enters by a secret sympathy into their
" guiltless joys, that revive in his memory
" the tender images of his youth, which, *by*
" *length of time, have contracted a soft-*
" *ness inexpressibly agreeable;* and thus the
" evening of life is protracted to an happy,
" honourable, unenvied [and *religious*] old
" age *."

May my mind be always open to appropriate pleasures; and may those pleasures improve the temper and disposition of my heart, as it passes towards that yet unknown country, where pure and unmixed delight only can be found!

* Dr. Gregory's Comparative View, p. 100.

MEDI-

MEDITATION XII.

The Old Man in Conversation.

Happiest of men! if the same soil invites
A chosen few, companions of his youth,
———————— now rural friends,
With whom, in easy converse, to pursue
Nature's free charms, and vie for sylvan fame.

ARMSTRONG.

MED. XII.

IF society be conducive to happiness, conversation is the essence of society; the proper use of which alone renders it truly valuable. Though it may be most agreeable to human feelings in the close of life, to enjoy a serenity of mind apart from fluctuating crowds, yet those feelings are not to be so much respected, as to drive the aged man, still capable of action, still in possession of his intellectual faculties, into

into a useless and unprofitable solitude. As too much society might destroy his peace, too little would lead him into danger. But seasonable conversation with those who can communicate to him the purest and most substantial pleasures, and who may receive from him in return the advantages of reflection and long experience, is that happy medium, that fixed point of propriety, which ought to be the desire, as it is certainly the true enjoyment, of old age. MED. XII.

Whether the situation of this delightful intercourse should be in the populous city, or in the rural walk, must be determined by previous habit and disposition of mind. God, in his goodness, has made *place* but a secondary consideration in the distribution of happiness. In a world that is to be supported by a variety of employments, variety of situations must be required. But as mind accompanies body, and comprehends that vital principle which animates the *whole man*, we must look *there* for the original of every pleasurable sensation, and the fountain of true enjoyment. We may wish indeed, as old age approaches, to

MED. XII.

exchange the crowded street for *patrician trees**; and if we possess a store of *mind* our wish may be rational and just; but if we miscalculate our desires, and require an alteration founded *merely* on an imagination, that change of place will produce a change of ideas, that happiness is more or less local, our best friends will be those who advise us to remain where we *are*, and to meet our wrinkles on their proper ground.

Perhaps if a kind Providence and kind friends had not allowed me the enjoyment of such a sweet retreat, as that in which these Meditations have been composed, I might have been inclined to have exclaimed with Horace "O Russ!" or with Armstrong "Happiest of men!"—but I should not have thought myself deserving of one *rural wish*, if I had not, not only acquiesced, but found delight in the busiest *hum of men*. For the proper scene of action is the scene of duty; nor should that scene be changed till the alterations of time render it necessary; and then a new scene of duty produces a new scene of action; reduced

* Cowley.

perhaps in its exertion and in the extent of its obligations, but still holding out sufficient employment for the mind, and never ceasing, it may be, its feeble usefulness, till the exhausted pulse of life stand still. MED. XII.

Amongst those duties which are protracted to the last end of life, that of *conversation* is the most prominent. Nature itself has given this direction to our remaining faculties; too frequently visible in the perversion of this useful talent; so much so indeed in this case, as to render the *loquacity* of old age proverbial. I dwell not however on the defects, but the perfection of an old man's conversation; and think that a finer picture cannot be selected for the pencil, than that of venerable age communicating the result of much thought, and much experience, to the willing ear of youth.

I would not here be thought to recommend the formal dictate, the austere, or repulsive precept. Manner, as well as matter, is of importance in imparting knowledge. Any thing therefore that looks like self-opinion or conceit, reprehensible and disgusting

MED. XII. gusting in early life, is equally reprehensible in age.

But that which provides the most valuable matter, provides also, for the most part, the most amiable manner, of instruction. *The more spiritual our minds are, the more heavenly will be our conversation.* "A good "man out of the good treasure of the heart, "bringeth forth good things *." It is hardly possible to conceive how much the very frame of that man is improved, which is inhabited by a virtuous heart. Features, rugged perhaps, and coarse by nature, are sweetly smoothed, and softened by religion. Though I am not so much of a physiognomist as to *decree* a character from a line of countenance or *the tincture of a skin*, yet the colour of religious truth may often be traced in the expression of a pure heart, and deservedly admired in a lovely feature.

"That *it is not good for man to be alone*," says a wise and good man, "is true in more "views of our species than one; and society "gives strength to our reason, as well as po-

* Matt. xii. 35.

"lish

"lish to our manners. The soul, when left "entirely to her own solitary contempla- "tion, is insensibly drawn by a sort of con- "stitutional bias, which generally leads her "opinions to the side of her own inclina- "tion. Hence it is that she contracts those "peculiarities of reasoning, and little *habits* "of thinking, which so often confirm her "in the most fantastical opinions *." This is often true in the character of old men who have withdrawn themselves from social intercourse, and have left themselves no opportunity of sifting their thoughts, and trying them by the standard of public sentiment. Hence are derived the positive mind that will not suffer an opposition, and the obstinate heart that will not bend to conviction. This is an error of judgment in an old person, to call it by no severer name, which well regulated conversation would contribute to remove. He would find that the alterations which had taken place since the days of his youth were not always wrong, and that frequently the change which he experiences, and which is the object of

MED. XII.

* Melmoth's Fitzosburne's Lett. 74.

his

MED. XII.

his complaint, arises rather from his own feelings and situation, than from any alteration in the things themselves. His own views being changed, both from internal and external causes, the discreet old man will make such allowances as are suitable to present circumstances, and will not unreasonably expect what cannot naturally be allowed.

But there is one topic of conversation, in which it ought to be the pleasure of every aged person to excel; that is, the conversation of THE BIBLE. Here let me not be misunderstood; or be supposed to imply that, the words of Scripture should be perverted to unworthy purposes, which must necessarily be the case if we produce them on every occasion. Ordinary occurrences may be related in ordinary language; and we must be careful not to dishonour God's word by unseasonable applications. We have only to turn our eyes on the history of the fanatical government of Cromwell, and the language of the *Independents* of that age, to behold the rock which true piety should avoid. The solemn language of inspiration was never intended to promote

mote deceit, or to cover hypocrisy, to be used by the inconsiderate, or hackneyed by the designing. It is the word spoken *in season*, which alone is pronounced *good*. When we seriously *think* of religion, let us seriously *speak* of it. If it always reside in our hearts, it will always be ready for our use. When an allusion can be made, and with a reasonable prospect of success, let not the opportunity be omitted, or rather let it readily be accepted; but *cast not your pearls before swine*, lest the injury done to religion be greater than the probable benefit to be attained. MED. XII.

There is no coolness towards religion in this restriction. The world must be renovated in a manner hardly yet to be expected, before such judicious cautions can safely be removed. But oh! how sweet when restraints are cast aside, when our views of religion are opened, when the renewed faculties have vigorous play, when the Saviour turns upon his servant and says *Mary!* whilst she, with raptured affections, runs towards him, embraces his feet, and replies *Master!*

It

MED. XII.

It is much to be lamented that ordinary conversation should not more frequently be converted to the service of religion, and take a serious turn. It is, I fear, too sure a proof of the decay of Christian principle, that invidious appellations are given to such discourses, or that ridicule should at any time be attached to those who speak *the truth as it is in Jesus.* Sometimes indeed the cause may be discovered in an indiscreet or injudicious teacher, but that forms no apology for the Scorner. He ought to distinguish between the lesson, and the instructor. The value, not the medium by which it is conveyed, should be his chief consideration. Such is the difference between the scoffer, and he who is ever ready to receive the truth, that, in the latter case, the seed, from whatever hand it comes, falls upon a genial soil, and brings forth fruit accordingly. He considers religious truth as always sacred. Its *precious balms* will will *not break the head*, depress the animal spirits, or injure the comforts, of any faithful son upon whom they may be poured. On the contrary, they will be the *oil of glad-*

gladness to him; will strengthen his limbs and refresh his heart; and send him *on his way rejoicing.* MED. XII.

Peruse St. Luke's interesting account of his conversation with the two disciples on the road to Emmaus. Though apparent strangers to each other, religious conversation soon made them friends. "Beginning at Moses and the prophets, the "unknown teacher expounded unto them, "in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself *." In similar conversations, when some good old friend instructs us in our duty, when he opens to us the rich mine of Scripture-truth, when he tells us what we must *believe*, *what we must do to be* saved, may we be fully sensible of his kindness, not obstinately reject the grace offered to us, but acknowledge with holy gratitude and Christian zeal that, "our "hearts did indeed burn within us, while "he talked with us by the way, and opened "unto us the Scriptures †!"

"Oh! I have seen (nor hope perhaps in vain,
"Ere life go down, to see such sights again)
"A vet'ran warrior in the Christian field,
"Who never saw the sword he could not wield;

* Luke xxiv. 27. † Ib. v. 32.

"Grave

MED. XII.

" Grave without dullness, learned without pride,
" Exact yet not precise, though meek, keen-eyed;
" A man that would have foil'd at their own play,
" A dozen would-be's of the modern day:
" Who when occasion justified its use,
" Had wit as bright as ready to produce,
" Could such from records of an earlier age,
" Or from philosophy's enlighten'd page
" His rich materials, and regale your ear,
" With strains it was a privilege to hear:
" Yet above all, his luxury supreme,
" And his chief glory was the Gospel theme;
" There he was copious as old Greece or Rome;
" His happy eloquence seem'd there at home,
" Ambitious, not to shine, or to excel,
" But to treat justly what he lov'd so well *."

* Cowper's Conversation.

MEDITATION XIII.

The Old Man's Experience.

With calm severity, unpassioned age
Detects the specious fallacies of youth:
Reviews the motives which no more engage,
And weighs each action in the scale of truth.

How blest, who thus by added years improved,
With cautious steps their lengthened journey tread,
And from the task of sultry life removed,
Converse with wisdom in it's ev'ning shade!

MRS. ELIZ. CARTER.

THE old man's experience is so nearly connected with his conversation, that they ought never to be separated. We will retire with him at any time to his easy chair, or his mossy bank, to hear the result of his deep reflections. It is interesting to sit beside him. He has been a contemporary of men whom we have read of with admiration; he has

MED. XIII.

MED. XIII.

has heard their sentiments on life and manners, and is ready to detail their instructive remarks. He has seen himself in various attitudes and situations. He can therefore fairly estimate the value of his motives, and give an account of his personal discoveries.—How much more lively is the impression made by a living witness, than that which is extracted from the best books! I would not depreciate the value of our *silent friends*, but am glad to bear ample testimony to that of those, who are still able to communicate that sound wisdom which is the result of protracted years.

In reflecting on the experience of an old man we must confine our observations to such a character, as is altogether qualified, by an improved mind, to become an instructor.—Age, it is true, may have produced experience. But a little observation will inform us that there is great latitude in the expression; for an old man may be as much deceived in the nature of his experience, as if he had been in pursuit of a very different object. Let us reduce his experience to the touchstone of *truth*, and then we shall soon detect deception. His heart must be duly impressed with

with the *love of God:* the effusion of the Holy Spirit must have imparted to him the *kindness of God:* his unfeigned humility must have made him sensible of the *mercy of God:* and the knowledge of his own corruption, and his faith in *Him*, whose merits alone are able to remove the burthen of his offences, must have become a vital principle within him, before he can beneficially communicate the light that he has been permitted to receive. In short, he must be convinced himself, before he can reasonably undertake to convince others; for, "if the light that is "in him be darkness, how great is that "darkness*!" MED. XIII.

But notwithstanding this difficulty in the communication of experience, we should not only not despise the wisdom of the aged, wherever it is found, but we should look for it with diligence, and improve it with thankfulness. A blind obedience to antiquity, reason does not require. Neither, on the other hand, does she attach a fancied value to any given truth, merely because it is not to be found in the records of past ages. In

* Matt. vi. 23.

these

MED. XIII.

these times of innovation, the remark cannot be without interest. To overturn long established maxims, and to bring *strong holds to ruin*, is a characteristic description of *modern improvements*. And if from public observation we pass into private life, too much of the same anarchy prevails. Filial reverence retains not its ancient value; for though, I trust, in numerous instances, nature is true to herself, and filial piety yet offers many amiable examples, the manners of the times are *too free*, both in principles and practice, not to dread the effects of a modern education.—"Ask thy father and he will shew "thee; thine ancients, and they shall tell "thee *." These are the words of Scripture and nature; they are the dictates of reason and understanding, of learning and reflection. They were good days when this precept flourished; and if we lament the changes which bad principles have produced among us, we must execrate that, as one of the most pernicious, which destroys domestic peace, eradicates reciprocal affection, deposes relative duty, and separates the parent and the child.

* Deut. xxxii. 7.

Every

MED. XIII.

Every age of man has its peculiar duties, and its peculiar temperament both of body and of mind. "The goodness of God," says the judicious Hooker, "having furnished "men with two chief instruments, both ne- "cessary for this life, hands to execute, and "a mind to devise great things; the one is "not profitable longer than the vigour of "youth doth strengthen it; nor the other "greatly, till age and experience have "brought it to perfection. In whom therefore "time hath not perfected knowledge, such "must be contented to follow them in whom "it hath *."

The experience of the aged then may be considered under two views; the experience of nature, and the experience of grace. This is implied in the general distinction of the natural, and the spiritual, man. The former without the latter, is a body without a soul. It exists indeed and performs the animal functions with sufficient perfection, but as its direction is wholly worldly, it has no reference beyond present convenience. That wily prudence which turns every event of life to worldly profit is characteristic of the one,

* Eccl. Pol. b. iii. s. 7.

whilst

MED. XIII. whilst that spiritual wisdom which foregoes specious benefits with an eye to future and eternal recompence, is descriptive of the other. The religious difference is great indeed: "for "they that are after the flesh do mind the "things of the flesh; but they that are after "the spirit the things of the spirit. For to "be carnally minded is death; but to be "spiritually minded is life and peace, be- "cause the carnal mind is enmity against "God; for it is not subject to the law of God, "neither indeed, can be *."

Secular virtues are the results of secular experience only; and men who have made these their study the world calls *wise*. Let us mark the progress.—

The young man, unbiassed by judgment, undirected by principle, and determined to promote his personal interests, plunges into a variety of occupations. In some he miscarries, in others he succeeds. Advanced a little in years, and improved in observation, he makes another effort to arrive at riches and honour, the objects of his unremitted attention. His success is now answerable to

* Rom. viii. 7.

his

his labour. He obtains an elevated place in society. As I imagine him to be destitute of those holy motives which alone can stamp a value on his actions, I may reasonably suppose that he soon despises the necessary tools of his advancement, and sacrifices many a sacred duty to the ends of his pursuit. Cold to his early friends, indifferent to censure, though not indifferent to applause, he passes briskly up the ladder of prosperity. He stimulates his wishes till he has accomplished his purpose, and attains by policy, what he cannot always gain by integrity. He becomes now an oracle of experience. He is indebted to his gray hairs for respect. The spring of his actions not being visible to the sight, the unsuspecting spectator gives him credit for discretion and penetration in his conduct for virtue and honesty in his motives. To consult him is to consult wisdom, so far as *this* world is *wise; but, to obey him* is to be lost to virtue. MED. XIII.

If we pass from a character of this description in private life, to one in public, we shall find the same system producing the same effect: and if I make use of the term *an old politician*, I shall sufficiently explain my meaning.

MED. XIII.

ing. The intrigues of courts, the intricate windings of public offices, the treaties of nations, &c. though they do not exactly come within the scope of my meditation, all afford strong evidences of the dangerous tendency of an old man's experience in worldly wisdom. Such therefore may truly be denominated the experience of *nature*.

But the experience of *grace* affords a more grateful picture. The motives of the youth are here fixed upon a different foundation. His first object is to conquer those natural propensities, acquired habits, and more than inoffensive infirmities, with which he finds himself oppressed. He begins by searching his heart for hidden failings; these, by the help of his religious knowledge, he endeavours to dispossess. He then fits himself for the active offices of life. Though diffident of his own attainments, his wishes are not ignoble, and he desires to improve his situation by every lawful means. His religion is so much uppermost in his mind, that he does not narrow his duty, merely by keeping with legal restraints; he rejects law itself, if I may so say, if it lead him to temptation; and accepts the law of a devout heart, an heart

heart pressing forward with warm affections towards the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus, in preference to that of a mere negative quality. To do no evil, he knows to be essentially necessary to salvation. But his knowledge of spiritual life goes a great deal further. A chain of happy consequences follows his confirmed faith. He possesses peace with God, peace with the world, and peace with himself. He glories in tribulation whenever it arises, "knowing that tribulation worketh patience; "and patience, *experience*; and experience, "hope"—*that* "hope which maketh not "ashamed, because the love of God is shed "abroad in his heart by the Holy Ghost "which is abundantly given unto him *."— Thus fortified by grace, every turn of his disposition, every incident of his life, presents an useful lesson. He feels how God blesses his means of living; and before he has attained the meridian of life perceives the valuable attainments both of his body and soul.— Having accurately scanned the good and evil as they came before him, his judgment is MED. XIII.

* Rom. v. 4, 5.

MED. XIII.

improved. The acquisitions of his youth form the treasures of his age. He is now no stranger to *experience*, under whatever sense it may be used. His experience of common life is clear and decided. He knows what may be expected from some circumstances above others, and can frequently discriminate motives, however wilfully suppressed. This experience of men and manners, wholly originates in his own *religious* experience. He viewed with an impartial eye the changes of his own heart, and one touch of Divine Grace rectified its errors. He transfers the reflection on himself, to his neighbour's benefit; and though Christian charity requires him to *hope* better things for his neighbour than he once *knew* of himself, yet he is willing to communicate his own experience to the minutest circumstance, that his example may conduce to the spiritual restoration of a fellow-creature. Here then he has a powerful medicine to offer to those who are sick of divers infirmities: and it will not be presented in vain. Reverence for his character produces obedience to his advice. Though his years decay, and his bodily powers fail, the snowy fleece upon his brow adds weight to his admonition,

monition, and bestows a new radiance on his accumulated wisdom. "Oh! how comely "a thing is judgment for gray hairs, and for "ancient men to know counsel! Oh! how "comely is the wisdom of old men, and un- "derstanding and counsel to men of ho- "nour *!" MED. XIII.

"Old age by long experience well inform'd,
"Well read, well temper'd, with religion warm'd,
"As time improves the grape's authentic juice,
"Mellows and makes the speech more fit for use,
"And claims a rev'rence in a short'ning day,
"That 'tis an honour and a joy to pay.
"The fruits of age, less fair, are yet more sound,
"Than those a brighter season pours around.
"And like the fruits autumnal suns mature,
"Through wintry rigours unimpair'd endure †."

* Ecclus. xxv. 4, 5. † Cowper's Conversation.

MEDI-

MEDITATION XIV.

The Old Man in Retirement.

O happy he, whom as his years decline
(His fortune and his fame, by worthy means
Attain'd, and equal to his mod'rate mind,
His life approv'd by all the wise and good,
Envied by the vain) the peaceful groves
———————— from this stormy world
Receive to rest, of all ungrateful cares
Absolv'd, and sacred from the selfish crowd!

ARMSTRONG.

MED. XIV.

WERE I to consult my own feelings, I should pronounce the place of an old man's retirement to be the proper scene of his happiness, and the glory of the remaining portion of his life. But here I would not wish to be mistaken. An absolute and abstracted solitude is no retirement, and the absence of kind and social friends no just cause of glory. The

MED. XIV.

The Frenchman's maxim *, so often repeated, must alway be understood, as founded in nature and truth that, however delightful we may imagine solitude, it will only be delightful to him who can *say* to a favourite friend, *Solitude is sweet !*

And such solitude is indeed sweet to him who has experienced trouble, and passed through the vexations of public life. This principle being acknowledged by the wise and good, thousands have desired a retreat from the *busy hum of men* who knew not how to enjoy it ; and who, soon disgusted with a situation which they had not properly considered, either remain a prey to restless uneasiness and misery, or return to the crowded street to seek their solitude among the million. The preparation of the heart, and the propriety of adapting the mind to the condition, are the grand secrets of happiness in retirement ; as indeed they are of happiness in every other situation of life. When a man knows that his active powers are exhausted, and that his future usefulness must originate in the sole occupation of his own thoughts, if

* Balzac. Fitzoburne's Letter xxv. La Bruyere. Cowper's Retirement.

he

MED. XIV.

he be a wise man he will take advantage of this knowledge by removing from a station that he can no longer fill with his usual ability, and will seek another, strongly pointed out to him by the vicissitudes of time. Here he shews his judgment: and his more established happiness will prove the wisdom of his choice.

But what must he carry with him into his sweet retreat?—His books of accompt, and his money bags? Alas! these would hang like millstones about his neck, and disturb the serenity of his evening hour. No. He must reject the intrusion of such turbulent, and now unnecessary companions. He must cast from him all that would drag him back again to earth; he must consider himself as free from such incumbrances, and be satisfied that the only passage now open to him is the passage to heaven.

We have lived in days of dangerous celebrity. We have beheld scenes in which the *immediate* hand of God has been manifest.—Whatever our profession or manner of life may have been, we have felt consequences, even in our sequestered cottages, which the peaceful of preceding times could not have imagined.

imagined. The world has been like an unsettled ocean; and where personal injuries have not penetrated, pernicious principles have found their way. If any of us have been actors in these scenes, or sufferers amidst this vast agitation of men—what is our desire? Surely to escape from the selfish crowd, and commune with our own hearts *under the vine and under the fig-tree.* Reflection will make such a change valuable; and if we know *where* to fix our once wandering thoughts, we shall feel as if lifted on a cloud, and on our road to bliss. "The devout Christian," says the pious Horne, "whom, in perilous times, and towards the "close of life, a gracious Providence has "thrown ashore in some sequestered corner, "from whence he views those secular tumults "with which he hath no further concern, is "perhaps arrived at the next degree of hap-"piness to that of just spirits made perfect *."

But we must not expect a visionary bliss. Capable as the mind is of elevation and dignity in a state of retirement, it is equally subject, in this valley of imperfection, to dis-

* Ps. cxxiv. 5.

eases,

MED. XIV.

eases, dreadful in their nature and fatal in their consequences. And even where no exaggerated evils follow it is necessary to bear our faculties meekly, *with reverence and godly fear.* The man of steady mind will neither attempt to rise so far above the world as to become an Enthusiast, nor to fall so far below the level of his nature, as to render himself a slave to brutal and sensual appetite. True religion avoids every extreme of conduct. Faith indeed implies one certain truth. Every deviation then from that point, is an error from that truth; and "whatsoever "is not of faith is sin *."

God sent us into the world, and he appointed it to be a *social* world. God gave us a being, and he designed it to be a being capable of *receiving*, and *bestowing*, happiness. When these ends are worthily accomplished, we accomplish the end of our creation. But if we admit sin, under any qualification, as conducive to this happiness, we counteract the intention of our Maker, and frustrate the operations of divine wisdom. The mind therefore in retirement, as well as the body in

* Rom. xiv, 23.

society,

society, is liable to fall into grievous error.— And never does this error more easily beset us, than when the decays of time, and the natural relaxation of the human frame, induce us to seek the shelter of a retired life. MED. XIV.

The advantages of a pious and religious conversation to an old person, as I have before remarked, are incalculable. The intercourse of rational discussion refreshes and revives the soul, preserves the faculties in use, and prevents, in a certain degree, that stagnation of mind and torpor of imagination, which are naturally incident to declining years. But admirable as we find conversation for these purposes of life, and beneficial as it must be both to the bodily and mental exertions of the aged, it is proper that they should look forward to another situation to which they are exposed, and endeavour to provide for a season when the friend is not at hand, and they are compelled to repose only on themselves. Every man must occasionally be left to himself, and called upon to subsist on that store of *mind* which he ought to have provided: and if he be not prepared for such a state, though his days be prolonged to an hundred years, he has not learnt half his duty.

But

MED. XIV.

But I will suppose the good old man to be withdrawn from his turbulent thoughts, as well as from the turbulent world, and in the covert of some close retreat enjoying all the sweets of religious meditation. See! Adam, *walking in his garden in the cool of the day*, and communing with his Maker. See! the second Adam spending whole nights in prayer to God in the solitude of a mountain. See! holy Nathanael under the shadow of his fig-tree. Behold also the true follower of *him* who suffered a most dreadful agony for man's sins in the garden of Gethsemane! behold him in his closet, or his chamber, in his peaceful groves, or in the winding of his favourite wood. If his heart at any time was full of his Saviour, while he was drinking in the sweet waters of the Gospel, and perusing with pious avidity the written word; if his mind was sensible of an awful and alarming, yet comforting, and consoling, impression, from the mouth of a minister in the assembly of the faithful; if he felt all the warmth of divine love descend upon his breast with the communication of the blessed sacraments; if the sweets of a pious conversation have lifted him up with grateful thoughts of his spiritual

spiritual condition; how must the recollection of all these inspire his inmost soul with an heavenly elevation under the happy circumstance of religious retirement? Whatever has *man* in it, must have imperfection. But here man, and the intervention of man, are totally excluded. *All is God.* How awful is the thought! Here the aged Christian stands alone; and, in the whole universe, he views nothing but his Maker and himself.—The Almighty Judge, and the condemned prisoner. But in contemplating his truly interesting situation, he beholds "The Saviour;" and, prostrate on the earth, accepts the sign of the Son of man in heaven. The consolation of the Comforter restores him to himself; and in the strength of these heavenly witnesses, he sings "Blessing and honour, and "glory and power, unto Him that sitteth "on the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever-"more *."

MED. XIV.

Such are the uses of religious seclusion at every period of our lives. But with what holy grace and celestial dignity, do they adorn the old man in his retired hours!

* Rev. vii. 12.

While

MED. XIV.

While he lives in the world, he employs the ordinances of the word to God's glory, and his own salvation. When he retires from the world, he approaches still nearer to the *well-head* of every heavenly grace, and partakes, as it were, of the more immediate communication of the spirit. In this situation, we have reason to imagine that he has attained that spiritual temper, which allies him to the fellowship of angels. To a good old man it is an *intermediate state* of existence, most comfortable, most truly desirable to him; when he has been enabled to sing a victor's song over a conquered, and a departing world. "The Lord, with his own right "hand, and with his holy arm, hath given "him the victory *," through Him whose merits and whose mercies only could accomplish it.

"Oh! where is peace? for thou its paths hast trod;
"In poverty †, retirement, and with God ‡."

In the silence of this hour, O my God, may I approach thy throne in devout and

* Ps. xcviii. 1.

† Renunciation of the pomps and vanities of this wicked world.

‡ Epitaph of Thomas a Kempis.

holy

holy prayer! and while the world, with all its pomps and vanities, its sorrows and its troubles, is cast at a distance, let me commune with mine own heart! How dreadful, and yet how sweet is this contemplation! My mind is in heaven; Oh! may I be *wholly* there, and *continually dwell* with *Him*, whose I am and whom I serve, my hope and comfort here, my everlasting salvation hereafter! MED. XIV.

MEDI-

MEDITATION XV.

The Old Man in Domestic Retirement.

———— Sufficiency, content,
Retirement, rural quiet, friendship, books,
Ease and alternate labour, *useful life*—

THOMSON.

MED. XV.

PLEASING as it is to behold the glow of health upon the cheek of youth, to see the first dawn of hope upon the human breast, and to sympathize with those transports which are the genuine offspring of activity and virtue; I know not that, sweet as these feelings are, they exceed the rational satisfaction of viewing religious old age in its domestic circle, "stealing itself from life, "and melting away by a gradual and un- "perceived decay" amidst attentive friends, supported by a sound faith, and enlivened by

by an earnest expectation of approaching bliss. If we estimate life according to the Gospel, we not only cannot regret, but must thankfully rejoice in so happy a termination of all the sorrows and the cares of life. The firmer our belief, the less will be our distraction as to worldly events; for when we can implicitly acquiesce in the dispensation of Providence, on motives of Christian righteousness, the labour of life is past, and we are ready to pray with holy Simeon, "Lord! "now lettest thou thy servant depart in "peace." MED. XV.

There are some years in the lives of old men—for the term *age* implies a period of *protracted* life—which are required to be employed in some appropriate engagements. Neither limbs nor animal spirits are now sufficient for the employments of youth. Worldly passions, we will hope, have now subsided—and what are possessions to him that must soon leave them for ever? We will again imagine the subject of our present thoughts to be sensible of the vanity of life, and the general depravity of worldly men. We will suppose too that he now considers himself as hav-

MED. XV.

ing escaped from dangerous and delusive snares, and free to run the remainder of his course unfettered by seducing pleasures, unincumbered with the daily anxiety of providing for the morrow. We may hope that a grateful posterity, or affectionate friends, wait upon his smiles, happy to receive instruction from his lips, ready and glad to communicate the most pious attention, the most interesting care. Here then is a *reciprocal* duty which needs no explanation. Ye who feel it can imitate; and ye who imitate must be happy.

The great art, if I may use such a term in delineating one of the sweetest expressions of *nature*, of procuring and retaining these domestic comforts, will be found in the regulation of the temper, and in the rational occupation of time. The regulation of the temper I ascribe wholly to religion. Who can study the words of divine wisdom with a convinced heart, and remain ignorant in so important a point? Love, divine love, breathes through every page. "Beloved! if God *so* loved us, we "ought also to love one another*." The

* 1 John iv. 11.

word

word *so* implies a volume. If God sent his own Son to satisfy sin for us by a painful and an ignominious death, what ought not to be expected of us as, the objects of so much love? What ought to be our *temper* towards all mankind? But, with a more particular reference to personal happiness, what ought to be our *temper* in that circle where all our private comforts meet, when age and increasing infirmities have shut out all others from our sight? What ought to be our tenderness to faithful wives and dutiful children, who will honour us from the circumstances of consanguinity alone; but who will spring towards us with a love beyond the love of kindred, when, in the father and the husband, they shall find the kindest and most benevolent of *friends?*

MED. XV.

Nothing can be considered as of greater importance to the prolongation of life, certainly none to its ease, comfort, and happiness, (which is a superior consideration) than the attainment and preservation of a *Christian* temper.

"Happy old man! whose worth all mankind knows,
"Except himself; who charitably shows,
"The ready road to virtue and to praise,
"The road to many long and happy days.

MED. XV.

" The noble arts of generous piety,
" And how to compass true felicity ;
" Hence did he learn the art of living well ;
" *The Gospel was his only oracle ;*
" Inspired by *that* he knows no other cares,
" Through near a century of pleasant years ;
" Easy he lives, and chearful shall he die,
" Well spoken of by late posterity *.

In the rational occupation of time, the old man knows no weariness of life, but passes from the practice of one duty to another, from one innocent, or useful, engagement of his mind to another, with the steadiness and elasticity of youthful days. Uninterrupted with the importunity of perplexing speculations ; unalarmed with rumours of rising or falling stock ; disengaged from the apprehensions of an embargo, or the fluctuation of a money market ; or, if in a more elevated situation, careless of political parties and projects of ambition ; he retires to his books and his devotion ; and while others are accumulating cares and troubles, he is busily employed in the improvement and restoration of his soul, in

* Flatman's Verses to Isaac Walton, (a little altered) Zouch's Ed. 8vo. p. xxx.

laying

laying up a permanent treasure in heaven. When profitable study or innocent recreation, *ease and alternate labour*, the hour of meditation or the rural walk, have had their turn, he resorts to the comforts of his fire side, and closes the pleasant day, and perhaps the *useful life* in charms of familiar and instructive conversation. MED XV.

I pass by those futile amusements which are too frequently presented to the aged; as the old man, whom I would now delineate, I presume to be still in possession of reasonable faculties and a religious heart.

Between the higher and the lower ranks of life, at this period of human existence, the difference is not great in a moral view; if we except the degree of education and external cultivation which the mind of the opulent has received. The foundation of comfort is in both the same. It springs from the same root, and produces the same happy fruit. True it is that the accommodation is widely different: but the clothing is not the man. And wherever the pure effects of Christianity are to be found,

we

MED. XV.

we shall neither inquire after the *tincture of skin* nor whether they reside in a cottage or a palace.

The pious, interesting and judicious Professor Gellert, in his moral Lessons *, introduces a young man inexperienced in the ways of the world, after drawing a false estimate of the happiness of a rich man, into whose splendid castle he had been introduced, visiting the cottage inhabited by an old man, who, he hears is fourscore and ten years old, poor, and well satisfied with his lot. He converses with the good old man, and asks, how he spends his time?—"I plant," answers he, "and I "cultivate the trees and gardens belong- "ing to my master, as long as my feeble "feet can support me; after which I com- "monly repose on this bench where I have "often sat when but a child. I occupy my "mind in thinking of my end, which I "hourly expect, and I return God thanks "for all the good he has given me to enjoy "during my life."—"In what do you con- "sider this good to consist?"—"In having

* Lesson viii.

"from

" from my youth enjoyed good health, and MED. XV.
" that I have been able to work to my four-
" score and tenth year; that I have never
" wanted bread, and that I have even been
" able to procure myself from time to time
" some little indulgencies; that God has
" given me a good wife, who peacefully
" journeys with me towards the grave,
" and employs herself in working out her
" salvation; a wife who loves me, takes
" care of me, and by whom I have had
" two children, who followed the paths of
" virtue, and whom the Almighty thought
" fit to recall some years ago. Finally,
" my dear sir, my greatest good in this
" life is, that God has preserved me from
" all sin committed against my conscience,
" that he has given me grace to be con-
" tented with my situation, and blessed
" me with the hope of everlasting felicity.
" I shall die satisfied and without any
" anxiety, except what arises from the
" fear of my aged companion being too
" much grieved for my loss."—" There is
" an old man, thought the youth to him-
" self, giving him some money, who is
" not unhappy though in an abject con-
" dition!"

MED. XV.

" dition!"—" But the cottage, the earthen " utensils, the coarse garments spun by " the good old woman, the porringer of " milk with black bread, on which our " old man makes his repast, his sorry bed, " clean it is true, but rather hard, his " labours at such an advanced age, his " face burnt by the sun, his hands hard- " ened by labour, his shaking head, all " these make the virtue and happiness of " the old man lose much of their value in " the eyes of our youth. In fact, what " objects are these for the *senses?* For one, " who judges, as he does, from *imagina-* " *tion*, what is a quiet life, what conve- " niences, what easy circumstances in a " certain degree, and a mode of life a " little distinguished?—Nevertheless the " worthy old man expires calmly some " days after in the arms of his wife, and " is one of the wisest and happiest of " mortals, *if we consider him beyond the* " *grave.*"

—And short of that, which is the best estate of man? He who contemplates eternity as his final condition, and practises a pure, pious, and, as far as his feeble powers

powers extend, unsininng obedience, as a proof of his Christian belief, will close that scene happily, which, with every one of us, whatever be our rank in life, must soon be closed for ever. MED. XV.

May the closing scene of my life be ever before my eyes, not as an object to dread, but as a prospect to enliven!

"My God! my Father, and my friend,
"Do not desert me in my end!"

MEDI-

MEDITATION XVI.

The Old Man's Recollection of his Baptismal Vow.

Happy if full of days—but happier far
If, ere we yet discern life's ev'ning star,
We can escape from custom's idiot sway,
To serve the Sov'reign we were born t'obey.
COWPER.

MED. XVI.

IT is not by turning away our eyes from the truth that we can expect comfort in our old age; but by thoroughly investigating every action, and indeed every motive, of the passing life, balancing our opportunities with our defects, weighing the inmost conceptions of our hearts, and comparing them, without prejudice or partiality, with the word and will of our Maker. Carelessness is too sure a symptom

tom of sin; and the wound that is not felt is in danger of never receiving a cure. Happy then is that man who reflects upon his true condition before the evil days are too far past; happy if he can recover his last moments, and redeem his mis-spent time. MED. XVI.

The circumstance of not having remembered his early religious engagements, is the first sin that calls for his repentance; and it is an overwhelming sin. What passed at our baptism, none of us indeed can remember, in a country where infant baptism generally, and happily, prevails. But let none of us imagine that because we do not remember the administration of that sacrament in our own case, we are therefore free from its engagements. Will the minor relinquish the estate purchased for him by his trustees before he was able legally to ratify the agreement in his own person? Will the young man renounce the benefit of that civil society, which presented him with rights and privileges infinitely valuable, before his understanding was able to inform him that it would be beneficial to him to accept them? Will either

MED. XVI.

either one or the other, at the age of manhood, acknowledge no covenant, but that into which he personally enters at that period of life when his days and his years are mature? I do not say that he is obliged to accept any *personal* covenant to his own injury, unauthorized by the laws of the land in which he lives: but when such a covenant is evidently for his own good, it would be madness to reject it. The law judges for him, who cannot judge for himself.

In the case of a religious contract, the analogy is just. The Christian parent is required by the positive injunction of that religion which he professes, to initiate his offspring, by appointed means, in the mysteries of that holy faith in which he has been himself instructed. "Go and "teach *all nations* (old and young from "every quarter) *baptizing* them in the "name of the Father, and of the Son, "and of the Holy Ghost*:"—an engagement including and implying a covenant of faith and obedience; faith, as the gate,

* Matt. xxviii. 19.

obedi-

obedience as the way, that leadeth unto life eternal. "Except a man be born of "water, and of the spirit, he cannot en- "ter into the kingdom of God*." Water is the sacramental sign, a spiritual life, the indispensable consequence, of religious obligation. The spiritual duty of a parent arises from these circumstances. It is the voice of nature which prompts the parent to afford his beloved child all the advantages of his situation. It is the voice of religion, a religion which *bringeth salvation*, which directs him to point out *the good and right way*, by which he may find rest unto his own soul. MED. XVI.

In the knowledge of this covenant of grace, the Christian infant is expected to be instructed: for when the faculties of the mind have been sufficiently expanded by time, a most impressive ceremony is provided by the church, that every holy obligation entered into by the surety may be ratified and confirmed by a pure and religious acceptance of the conditions, or terms of the baptismal vow. The young

* John iii. 5.

Christian

MED. XVI.

Christian now acts wholly from himself. He comprehends the duty and the obligation; and if actual sin did not intrude into the recesses of his heart, and pollute even his best intentions, the innocence of the baptized infant would be conspicuous to the termination of his life. But alas! such is not human nature. Through the infirmity of the flesh we fall from grace, and become the servants of sin. Although we were regenerated and born anew by baptism, yet no mysterious effect will remain, unless we *continue* the blessed influence of the spirit by a perpetual preservation of our faith, by daily prayer, and unremitted diligence. When we let go our integrity, and resist the divine spirit of God, at whatever period of our lives, we renounce our baptismal vow, and require the entire renewal of the grace of God to re-instate us in that condition from whence we have sadly fallen. *New hearts*, *new desires* must be put into our breasts; indeed so strong is the language of Scripture in describing this necessary change, that we are told that we must become *new creatures* before all this can happen,

happen, and we can be restored to the image of God. MED. XVI.

What a task then remains for man in the decline of life! He looks back upon a journey interrupted by many sorrows. He looks back upon a life polluted and varied by many sins. He takes his contemplation from the moment of his birth, and perceives that he was born in sin. He endeavours to recollect the first dawning of his reason; still he observes that the *thoughts of his heart were only evil continually.* He has been told proverbially, and some popular philosophers have said, that the mind of a child is like a sheet of white paper, pure and immaculate, unsoiled by native vice or any unclean impressions.—Has he found it so? Alas! he confesses that he does not remember the time when he did not sin. But does he remember the time when he promised to renounce sin, and accept a Saviour? Surely he remembers the impression of his first religious instructions, and the moment when he accepted in his own person the vows of his infant baptism. Here then he commences the trial of his faith. He probes the bottom of his soul with scrutinizing inquiries, and returns dissatisfied with

MED. XVI.

with the search. A long life has elapsed, when opportunities of amendment have continually presented themselves. The grace of God has been ever ready; and it has required no small degree of resistance, and considerable vigilance of inveterate depravity to keep it at a distance. The *baptismal vow*, though the first in order of time, as of value, has been plunged into oblivion; and *the blessed cross wiped off* from that forehead, where it was once planted with the happiest omens.

Aged man! bring now all these things to thy remembrance. Yet a few more days and nights, and they will be closed upon thee for ever. Thou wast called upon, at thy first entrance into life, as a proof of thy allegiance to Him who first placed thee in his service, to renounce the great deceiver of mankind, the vile practices of a wicked world, and the sinful lusts and passions of a fallen nature.—Thou *didst* renounce them. Thou wast required to profess the only faith, and, of course, to use the only means, that could fortify thy soul against the commission of these grievous offences. Thou *didst* profess it. Thou wast directed to make manifest the

MED. XVI.

the soundness of thy faith by a conformable conduct, by an holy, strict, and persevering obedience to the will and commandments of God.—*This also thou didst vow;* and to this thou didst assent.—Aged man! from the brow of this hill which thou hast with difficulty attained, look down upon that far extended plain which thou hast passed. The nearer parts of the prospect thou canst easily discern, but the distant horizon is enveloped in mist. Suppose the mist should clear away, what wouldst thou behold?—What! dost thou turn aside thine eye, lest it should bring before thee long forgotten difficulties, and temporal obstructions? What then wilt thou do when the moral mist is dispelled, when the horizon of righteousness is cleared?—when the unperformed vow, and solemn asseveration, are presented fully to thy sight?—Aged man! fall prostrate before thy Saviour's cross; for if any hope remain for thee, it can only originate in this sacred source.—Thou hast promised a renunciation of the world's vanities, and the world's seducers: thou hast followed both. Thou hast vowed an holy faith:—thou has neglected, or rejected, this beneficial mean of grace. Thou

MED. XVI.

hast promised obedience:—but obedience hast thou not performed. What is the dreadful consequence? Thou art become obnoxious to the *curse of the law*—"cursed is every "one that continueth not in all things which "are written in the book of the law to do "them *." Aged man! fall prostrate before thy Saviour's cross; for he performed that unsinning obedience which thou in vain didst promise; nay more, he paid the penalty, sinless and unoffending as he was, which was due to thy iniquity—"Christ hath redeemed "us from the curse of the law, being made "a curse for us; for it is written, Cursed is "every one that hangeth on a tree †." Call then to remembrance thy baptismal vow, with the happy appendage of an expiation of thy sin. But know, old man! Christ died only for those who, "through faith, are "blessed with faithful Abraham ‡." Possessed of this invaluable treasure, the most youthful Christian will infallibly be saved; without it, the unbeliever of an hundred years old must sink into destruction. Recall then the days of thy youth, when thou didst

* Gal. iii. 10. † Gal. iii. 13. ‡ Gal. iii. 9.

present

present thyself an ingenuous disciple of thy Saviour at his holy fount. If his blessed spirit hath preserved thee in any measure from pollution, seek him once more in *the place where his honour dwelleth*, and bow thankfully before him. If, unhappily for thee, thou hast to mourn long years of forgetfulness and folly, make not those years longer by delay. The sacrament of the Lord's supper is a renewal of the covenant of baptism; and the renovation of a good conscience, thou wilt find a *continual feast*.—Be regenerate and born anew through the spirit, and then "thou shalt not be ashamed to confess the "faith of Christ crucified, and manfully to "fight under his banner against sin, the "world, and the Devil, and to continue "Christ's faithful soldier and servant unto "thy life's end*."

MED. XVI.

"O Holy and eternal Jesu, who in thine "own person was pleased to sanctify the "Waters of Baptism, and didst make them "effectual to the purposes of grace and sal-"vation, grant that the holy effects of them "may remain with me to my life's end. O

* Office for Baptism.

MED. XVI.

"be pleased to pardon those interruptions of "that state of favour in which thou didst "then plant me by thy grace: and let that "holy spirit which moved upon those holy "waters never be absent from me, but call "upon me and invite me by perpetual soli- "citations and inducements to holiness; that "I may never return to the defilements of "sin, but by the answer of a good con- "science, may please thee, and glorify thy "name, and do honour to thy religion and "institution in this world, and may receive "the blessings and rewards of it in the world "to come, being presented to thee pure and "spotless in the day of thy power, when thou "shalt lead thy Church to a kingdom and "endless glories. Amen *."

* Bp. Taylor.

MEDI-

MEDITATION XVII.

The Old Man's Progressive Virtue.

Progressive virtue and approving heaven.
THOMSON.

TO check the pride and arrogance of man, Almighty God has ordained that every thing in the spiritual, as in the natural, world, shall attain that degree of perfection which he permits, only by a gradual progress. "Nothing is perfect in its beginning, where the "fall brought on imperfection. The strongest "man must be first a child, the greatest "scholar must be first a school-boy. In the "best ordered governments, dignity and au-"thority must be attained by degrees; the "most skilful artificer was once an ignorant "learner: the tallest oak an acorn *." This MED. XVII.

* Baxter's Saints Everlasting Rest, c. ix. s. l.

is

MED. XVII.

is the constant course of nature, and the progressive regularity in the attainments of art. The same order is invariably observed in the kingdom of grace. Some indeed who have encouraged an enthusiastic opinion of *perfection*, have mistaken a momentary conversion for an established habit. But the word of God gives no sanction to such a proception. If it had, the Apostle would not have exhorted the believers to "*grow* in grace "and in the knowledge of their Saviour *;" nor have required them to aim at higher spiritual qualifications. He that is in possession of the *best*, will never look back upon that which is not *so* good. But alas! who is he, in this imperfect world, that stands on such an eminence? He has reached only an imaginary height, and if he examine his elevation by a true perspective, he will find still higher mountains than his own.

The old man, who has laboured up the hill with some difficulty, and considerable hazard, is well qualified to speak his experience on this subject. He has traced the progress of his mind, and carefully watched

* 2 Pet. iii. 18.

the

the influence of the religious principle, from the baptismal fount almost to the borders of the grave. He has too often discovered in pursuing the journey of life, that when he has taken two steps forward, the allurements and propensities of sin have frequently drawn him at least one step backward. When he had overcome one difficulty, and thought himself approaching the summit, the sand gave way beneath his feet, and the gulf of darkness threatened him with destruction. Still, however, he pressed on, not discouraged by his many impediments. He called out for spiritual help, and he found it. Each day he gained something; and the nearer he perceived himself to the almighty object of his wishes, *the prize of his high calling*, every nerve was stronger, every energy increased. MED. XVII.

In an old man of pious thought, well established in his religious belief, cool in his judgment, and regular in his conduct, a progressive goodness will be very perceptible. He looks back upon a time when good principles were but beginning to take root in him. He well remembers the time, when the predominant power of sin threatened,

MED. XVII.

ened, and indeed inflicted, many evils. He remembers too that he was sensible of this power, and shrunk from its defilements. Divine grace began to shew itself in his heart. Still however he had not disentangled himself. Though he wished well to religion, and was not guilty of gross offences, yet the religious principle was weak within him; for though he shunned the commission of wilful sin, he did not ardently desire the invaluable unction of the spirit. Though years had in some measure matured his bodily faculties, his spiritual part remained long defective. What danger of the soul in this protracted season of doubt! Had death surprised him in this unfinished and unfurnished state of mind, how dreadful the consequence! Fatal is the case of the slumbering sinner. And not much better is his condition who rests in a *first* resolution of amendment. But happily for the character which I describe, he makes one effort more; he now clearly perceives his peril, and struggles to be free. Yet age makes a considerable impression on his frame, before the pure light of divine truth breaks upon his mind. Every help that

can

can be then procured, is sought for with avidity. He finds many means of spiritual improvement, which, in the days of his religious insensibility, he neglected to make use of. Even those very ordinances, which had helped him thus far on his road to divine knowledge, he discovers to contain within them many greater, and even yet unforeseen, advantages. God's word and God's ministers appear to him under a new impression. The former does not offer to him a mere moral lesson, nor does the preaching of the latter consist only of the graces of oratory, or present him with words of soothing and unoffending application. "The word of God is quick and "powerful and sharper than any two-edged "sword *:" and the minister of God, like the first preacher of righteousness under the Gospel dispensation, is "a burning and "a shining light." New views of spiritual life, and new prospects of spiritual improvement rise before him. The sacrament of the Lord's supper now offers him the strongest evangelical blessing—a real and an effec- MED. XVII.

* Heb. iv. 42.

tual

MED. XVII.

tual mean of grace; and not only a formal distinction. The *heart of stone* now softens into the *heart of flesh;* and every event of his life, his personal sufferings, his afflictions, his deliverances from misfortune, his deliverance from sin, his joys and his sorrows, his sense of divine correction, and his sense of divine goodness are all spiritually discerned, and by divine grace the inseparable motive, all help forward *the old man's progressive virtue.*

At this period how joyfully does the good old man congratulate with himself on the progress he has made towards his heavenly calling! Not proudly exulting, but humbly hoping, in the mercies of the Saviour. If *length of days* be on his right hand, on his left are the *riches and honours* of a divine life, the true enjoyment of all Christian graces: "his ways are ways of pleasantness, "and all his paths are peace *." How sweetly does his mind rest on the different gradations of his spiritual improvement! He recollects his delightful feelings when the first clear ray of holy light burst upon his

* Prov. iii. 27.

eye-

eye-lid, and brought him the first perception of that evangelical truth—"the sting of "death is sin, but thanks be to God which "giveth us the victory through Jesus Christ "our Lord*." From this moment he traces with distinct observation the strengthening influences of the spirit, like the rising sun, first illuminating one dark spot, and then another, in his soul. He *thought* that he knew his Saviour when he was young; but now, a more intimate union with him shews him that, that knowledge was weak and defective. He approaches him now with a more lively faith; he feels that faith increasing every day, and travels upon the strength of it, reanimated with a well-founded hope, and refreshed in the spirit, to *Horeb the mount of God.* MED. XVII.

The good old man has now daily opportunities of exercising his spiritual mind; that "the trial of his faith might be found "unto praise and honour and glory at the "appearance of Jesus Christ†." In adversity, he acquiesces with implicit confi-

* 1 Cor. xv. 57. † 1 Pet. i. 7.

dence:

MED. XVII.

dence: in prosperity, he rejoices in hope. In depression of animal spirits, he rallies in contemplation of the love of God: in elevation of mind, he rests on the humility of his Saviour. In Sorrow, he wipes away the tear with the prospect of an heavenly country, and an everlasting home: in pleasure, he overlooks the enjoyment of present comforts, having his eye fixed on *joys unspeakable and full of glory*. Advanced, as he now is, in the divine life, as well as in the natural, "he counts all things but "dung that he may win Christ *." He has but one object in view—but one vast idea fills his whole soul. There are, he knows, "celestial bodies, as well as bodies ter- "restrial:" and, what is more to his present purpose, through the revelation of the will of God, he can appreciate the value of each —"the glory of the celestial is one, and the "glory of the terrestrial is another †." He is thankful for the body which has afforded him terrestrial comforts; still more so, as through God's goodness, it has been made

* Phil. iii. 8. † 1 Cor. xv. 40.

a mean

a mean of salvation to him; but the body of his glorification, the body with which he shall be raised, the body which will be fitted for the society of angels, and for the presence of God himself, is that which he looks forward to with a warm and an inextinguishable longing. MED. XVII.

Our nearest approach to the grave ought not therefore to put an end to our desires of spiritual improvement. Nothing on earth is perfect. We may fall from grace at our last hour. It was the modest acknowledgment of a wise man that *in his old age he was a learner:* and another observed with equal wisdom, that *when he had one foot in the grave, yet he would have the other in the school.*

The fable of the dying swan is realized in the departing hour of a truly religious old man. As his delights are then most pure, and unmixed with the smallest particle of *earth*, his language affords the communication of the most heavenly thoughts. He is only not in heaven. "My heart was "hot within me," said holy David; "while "I was musing, the fire kindled; then "spake

MED. XVII.

" spake I with my tongue, Lord! make me " to know mine end, and the measure of " my days—and now Lord! what wait I " for? my hope is in thee *."

How many heavenly discourses are recorded in Scripture of good men, particularly of good *old* men, at the approach of death! We remember the prophetical blessings of Isaac, of Jacob, and of Moses. It has been remarked too, that " as our Saviour " increased in *wisdom* and *knowledge*, so " did he also in their *blessed expressions*, " and in the words of good old Baxter, *still* " *the last the sweetest:* what an heavenly " prayer? what an heavenly advice doth he " leave his disciples, when he his about " to leave them? When he saw that he " must leave the world and go to the Father, " how doth he wean them from *worldly ex-* " *pectations?* How doth he mind them of " the *mansions* in his Father's house? and " remember them of his coming again to " fetch them thither? and open the union " they shall have with him and with each

* Ps. xxxix. 3.

" other?

" other? and promise them to be with him MED. XVII.
" to behold his glory? There is more worth
" in those four chapters, John xiv. xv. xvi.
" xvii. than in all the books in the world
" beside *."

When Paul, the aged †, wrote from his prison to his converts at Philippi, and when he took his leave of the church at Ephesus, his affectionate language, fervent prayers, and pastoral blessings, must have drawn tears from every eye, and must have left an indelible impression of the weight and value of his instructions. On such expiring saints, if envy were in heaven, angels might look down with envy. But what should be our sensations on earth when we behold the same delightful prospect?—O my soul! spring forward to this scene; make thyself ready for it by an incessant supplication for the graces necessary for thy support in so interesting an hour. But, my soul! rest not in thyself. Thou art altogether faint, weak and unprofitable. Thou shrinkest—why dost

* Saint's Everlasting Rest, p. 4, c. vii. s. 7.

† Philemon ix.

MED. XVII.

thou shrink? See! the hand of mercy is held out for thee by redeeming love—snatch it with reverence and godly fear, and then enter—boldly *enter, into the joy of thy Lord.*

MEDITATION XVIII.

The Old Man's Relapse into Sin.

O pity! and shame that they, who to live well
Entered so fair, should turn aside to tread
Paths indirect, or in the midway faint?

MILTON.

MED. XVIII.

WHILE I have meditated on the transitory drama of human life, and have selected from the passing scene particular objects for contemplation, how has my heart been filled, sometimes with pity, sometimes with indignation, at the relapses of many whose minds were formed for better things! I have seen them under the severe and steady discipline of youth; I have observed them rising gradually in the practice of virtue; and experiencing the substantial comforts of religion. It has been a pleasant occu-

MED. XVIII.

pation to watch, how the blessings of divine Providence accompanied their endeavours, and to rejoice with them in the attainment of many favourite wishes. In all this period they never suspected the deceitfulness of their own hearts: or at least they found every earthly plan so easily accomplished, and their spiritual concerns so peaceably arranged, that they looked with little apprehension on their continuance. But alas! the calm at length was over: their security was fallacious. They discovered themselves to be in the exact situation of the daughter of Babylon, when the Prophet applied to her this important caution—"Thou saidst, "I shall be a lady for ever—so that thou "didst not lay these things to thine heart, "neither didst thou remember the *latter* "*end of it**."

It is indeed the cause of melancholy reflection to see those, *who to live well, entered so fair*, who began the course of nature with such fair prospects both of temporal and eternal happiness, and who continued that course for many years with the antici-

* Is. xlvii. 7.

pation

pation of an happy conclusion of their journey, unexpectedly turn aside, and, in the peculiarly expressive language of the poet, *tread paths indirect, and in the mid-way faint.* MED. XVIII.

I repeat my observation, *it is the cause of melancholy reflection;* for no man who has lived half a century of years, and made even common remarks on human life, but must have seen its truth exemplified, frequently in others, and perhaps not seldom in his own breast. This is a point in which the strictest caution is necessary to those who have entered, or are entering into that stage of life, when old age is imagined to commence. The mind that has been buoyed up with prosperous fortune, the soul that has been soothed with the quiet which it has experienced, have arrived at an eminence of danger which they looked not for. When we begin to perceive a change in the conduct of those who have thus far carried it fair to the world, we have reason to suspect the stability of their principles. Not that their principles were originally defective, but they neglected to establish them

MED. XVIII.

by the only means of true security, the application of religious belief. "These are "they," as the parable of our Lord well expresses it, "such as hear the word, and the "cares of the world, and the deceitfulness of "riches, and the lusts of other things enter- "ing in, choke the word, and it becometh "unfruitful *."

An early piety, a mature integrity, are indeed amiable and attractive. They are more; they are beneficial to the souls of others, as well as to the soul of the possessor. But when they fall, when they are betrayed to sin, even angels weep. Yet, from the radical corruption of human nature, this is sometimes the case. From the moment that they trust to the rectitude of their own actions, the whole tenour of their lives affords a mere negative goodness. Perhaps they commit no wilful sin; perhaps they retain the form of every amiable virtue; yet as these are not secured, by casting all, where all are due, there needs no other interpretation of their fall from righteousness. Ah! had they cherished the spark of divinity that

* Matt. xiii. 22.

was within them, had they diligently searched out their spirits, had they reflected, for they could not but know, that "*it is not in man* "*that walketh to direct his own steps* *," they had not fallen at the very threshold of the temple! MED. XVIII.

We allow that such a character began well; we allow too that he proceeded fairly: but we cannot allow that he should win the prize, unless he ran the race. He had before him the soundest motives that ever man had, for accomplishing the desire of every faithful Christian. But as he had, in the course of his progress, discarded the principle of *fear*, he left unguarded the gate of iniquity. The tempter, always busy, seized the opportunity, and a relapse into sin was the inevitable consequence.

This is the case, not of the decidedly wicked man, but of the careless liver. The latter perhaps would shrink from a comparison with the former. But in what, eventually, do they differ?—or what superior benefit can arise to him who escapes the miserable end of a murderer, but falls a fatal sa-

* Jer. x. 23.

crifice

MED. XVIII.

crifice to some more fashionable, more attractive, or less offensive crime?

Early as we may have begun to tread the courts of the Lord, long as we may have continued in them, we have still many reasons to know that our religious integrity is assailable from many quarters. There is a sin which more easily besets one man than another, and every man falls by his *own* sin.—The resistance which we give to these insinuating temptations, the confidence which we place in that holy arm which alone can defend us from them, or turn them aside from us, is our only security. If we rely on our own strength, we are undone; for vicious indulgencies, and sudden or unexpected temptations "have cast down many wounded, yea "many strong men have been slain by them *." The result is as various as the assault. Some are *wounded*, others are *slain*. Some recover, others are destroyed. Some live by grace, others die in sin. The reflection is awful; and leads us to consider, what may be the end of our own habits of life. If we stand self-convicted, let us cast ourselves before

* Prov. vii. 26.

the

the free mercy of our Judge. If we feel ourselves the children of redemption, let us go on from grace to grace by cultivating the means of salvation. But let us not *rest in means.* Means may fail us; but God, through Christ, and the unction of his Holy Spirit, will fail us never. MED. XVIII.

The relapse is more dangerous than the original disorder, in the spiritual, as in the natural man. The weakened mind in the one case, as the weakened body in the other, is less capable of resistance. In our spiritual concerns the depression is indeed great.—Why, Because we sin against conviction: and if death should come upon us by surprize, or if our dying contrition should prove no godly sorrow (for then the testimony of an holy life will be wholly wanting,) our state and condition are deplorable. Then we shall experience only "the sorrow of the "world, which worketh death *."

The Christian is placed in a state of salvation by baptism. He makes vows and resolutions of obedience, as proofs that he has been called to a state of grace; for "without

* 2 Cor. vii. 10.

"holiness

MED. XVIII.

"holiness no man shall see the Lord *." He continues for a while in this state, and performs his vows and resolutions. But alas! ere long the tempter comes. The world seizes his vows, and rescinds his resolutions. He falls from his baptismal grace, and the latter end is worse with him than the beginning. A restoration from this state is considered by the Apostle, as a case of great difficulty. The very expression of it should make the apostate tremble. "It is impos-"sible"—it is highly improbable, it is, at least, very difficult—"for those who were "once enlighthened, and have tasted of the "heavenly gift, and were made partakers of "the Holy Ghost, and have tasted the good "word of God, and the powers of the world "to come; if they fall away to renew them "unto repentance, seeing they crucify to them-"selves the Son of God *afresh* and put him to "open shame †." The blessings which man loses by relapse are here accurately stated.—They are the blessings of his redemption through Christ; of which, baptism is the pledge. His loss too is stated in very striking

* Heb. xii. 14. † Heb. vi. 4.

terms.

terms. As his whole gain was through the medium of baptism; his whole loss arises from its rejection. He may continue in sin till he work in himself an utter impossibility of repentance. There is but *one baptism*, and therefore he cannot be again *renewed* by baptism. He cannot recover a legal right and title to mercy which he lost by falling from his baptismal vow. What must he then do in such deplorable circumstances? Though he cannot be regenerated again by *baptism*, yet he may be saved by the uncovenanted grace and mercy of God in Christ through faith and repentance. For, "where sin "abounded, grace did much more abound: "that as sin hath reigned unto death, even "so might grace reign through righteousness "unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord *."

MED. XVIII.

How consolatory is this declaration to him, who, in his old age, is convinced of sin, and endeavours to recover that state from whence he had fallen; for though the return be difficult, he finds that it is not without hope!— "Be watchful," saith the Spirit in the Revelations, to a church were danger was. "Be

* Rom. v. 20.

"watchful,"

MED. XVIII.

"watchful," saith the same Spirit to the man bending, at the same time, under years, and spiritual infirmities, "and strengthen the "things which remain, that are ready to die; "for I have not found thy works perfect be- "fore God. Remember, therefore, how "thou hast received and heard, and hold "fast, and repent *."—"What I say unto "you I say unto all—Watch †!"

Alas! how often have I slumbered on my watch! God grant that, for the future I may no longer sleep in sin, but be revived by the clear shining of that true and blessed *light which "lighteth every man that cometh "into the world* ‡."

* Rev. iii. 2. † Matt. xiii. 37. ‡ John i. 8.

MEDITATION XIX.

The Old Man's Relapse into Sin.

Lost SOLOMON! pursue this thought no more:
Of thy past errors recollect the store:
And silent weep—

PRIOR.

NO state of mind affords greater food for despondency, than that of him who relapses into sin after having been once enlightened by the pure rays of Christian virtue. He has reason to be acquainted that there is an aggravation in his case, which places him *below* the condition of those who never possessed his opportunities of knowledge. When this case, and this reflection, meet in a person of declining age, the feeble mind is ready to sink under the pressure. MED. XIX.

Far be it from pious meditation to soothe a soul

MED. XIX.

a soul in sin, or to apply the remedy of a deceitful comfort. To speak *smooth things* when the slumbering sinner requires to be roused by the sound of a trumpet, is to betray our trust; and leads to a belief that we are not animated by a firm confidence in that truth, which we are commissioned to proclaim. If we say to a person once eminent for virtuous qualities, once a distinguished servant of the Gospel, but now, relaxed in conduct, weak in faith, seduced by error, that the good which he once did will not be forgotten, but will balance an accompt between him and heaven, the language is the language of blasphemy. It is directly opposite to that of the Prophet—"All the right-"eousness that he hath done shall not be "mentioned; in his trespass that he hath "trespassed, and in his sin that he hath sin-"ned, in them shall he die*." Yet such language *is* held forth in a world that wishes to palliate its own wickedness. Balance an accompt between the sinner and his God!—I should not have repeated the expression, if total ignorance of the terms of Gospel-forgive-

* Ez. xxxiii. 13.

ness,

ness, had not led many grievous offenders to shelter themselves under its protection.— "All have sinned, and come short of the "glory of God *." When we have made this confession in the sincerity of our souls, we may then, as the Apostle continues, be "justified freely by his grace, through the "redemption that is in Christ Jesus †." MED. XIX.

But compassion for the soul of the aged man relapsing into sin, induces me to attempt the removal of a difficulty which may considerably affect the peace of his mind. He sometimes imagines that the day of grace may be past; and that there remains for him "no "place for repentance, though he seek it "carefully with tears ‡." The day of grace will never pass so long as life continues.— God's promises of pardon are general and universal; unconfined to time, place, or person. "*To day*, if ye will hear his voice, "harden not your hearts. Exhort one ano- "ther daily while it is called *to-day*, lest *any* "*of you* be hardened by the deceitfulness of "sin §." Final impenitence then is the cause

* Rom. iii. 23. † Rom. iii. 24.
‡ Heb. xii. 17. § Heb. iii. 13.

of

MED. XIX.

of final condemnation. But beware! an important truth rests under the observation. A man may sin so long, and with so much inveteracy, that he may have no inclination to repent; and if death should find him in such a state, *the day of grace will be past indeed.* A man may outlive the day of repentance, and thus become hardened in sin; but no man can outlive the mercies of God promised to the faithful.

Some passages of Scripture indeed press upon the dejected mind, but it requires no force of interpretation to render them easy to the sincere penitent—"If we sin wilfully "after we have received the knowledge of the "truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for "sins *." From the construction of the epistle, the expression can refer only to those who apostatize from the Christian faith.—Wilful sins indeed are of a deadly cast; but our blessed Lord himself assures us that, "*all manner of sin* shall be forgiven unto "men †." Are we then wiser than Christ? Every wilful sin doth not subject the offender to everlasting punishment, because

* Heb. x. 26. † Matt. xii. 31.

he

he may find mercy by the evangelical means of faith and repentance, accompanied by a corresponding holiness of life. MED. XIX.

"True: but there is a *repentance not to be* "*repented of*—if I have been guilty of a sin "for which there is no forgiveness, what is "to become of me? I shall be rejected, *like* "*Esau, who found no place for repentance* "*though he sought it carefully with tears**." The text here alluded to by the melancholy mourner, infers no such impossibility. The Apostle is inculcating the dangerous consequences of despising the blessings of the Gospel, and of relapsing into all the vicious courses of a worldly life. He illustrates his observation by an instance from the book of Genesis, where the conduct of Esau strongly resembled that of the apostate sinner; who first rejects what it is his duty to retain, and then supplicates for what he is not able to recover. In common life, the discontented man, in a moment of petulance, resigns a situation of considerable responsibility, and another is appointed; he repents of his precipitate behaviour, and petitions to be reinstated.

* Heb. xii. 17.

MED. XIX.

stated. "No," says his employer; "to re-
"instate you, would disarrange all the plans
"that have been adopted in consequence of
"your departure. Another fills your situ-
"ation; what he now performs so well, must
"not be disconcerted; I am therefore ob-
"liged to reject your application."—Such was the case of him, who lost his father's blessing by contemptuously disposing of his right of inheritance.—"Look diligently, lest "any man fail of the grace of God; lest any "root of bitterness springing up, trouble "you, and thereby many be defiled; lest "there be any fornicator, or profane person, "as Esau, who for one morsel of meat sold "his birthright. For ye know how that af-"terward when he would have inherited the "blessing, he was rejected; for he found no "place for repentance, though "he sought "it carefully with tears *."—The observation that Esau's repentance *could not* be accepted, however he desired it, is founded on a mistake. He is stiled a *profane person*, because in renouncing his birthright, he renounced the *prophetic blessing* which accompanied it.

* Heb. xii. 15, 16. 17.

But

MED. XIX.

But the repentance mentioned, is *not the repentance of Esau, but of his father Isaac,* who would not revoke the blessing he had given to Jacob, though Esau, then convinced of his error, *sought it carefully with tears.* The case of Esau then is only so far applicable to a Christian, as when a Christian relapses into sin, and continues in it. He that rejects the faith after he has been baptized, rejects the privileges conferred by baptism. Thus far the parallel will hold. But it will not be inferred that a wicked man's repentance will not be accepted; though it is effectual to prove that, an ungodly Christian, who prefers the vices and false enjoyments of the world, to the hopes of heaven and salvation, whatever claim he may make to the privileges he has forfeited, or however importunate he may be in his demands, shall receive no blessing from the Lord. Esau despised the spiritual blessings of his family: the apostate Christian does the same. It is not more likely that the great Father of mercies should alter his eternal condemnation of sin, than that Isaac should be induced to accept the repentance of Esau under such

MED. XIX.

circumstances.—"I have blessed him; yea, "and he shall be blessed *."

Nothing here restrains the will of heaven from forgiveness, when we seek it on pure motives of Christian truth, and with *humble, lowly, penitent and obedient hearts.* Aged penitent! then take comfort: it is God who lengthens your day of grace. "The fear "of the Lord prolongeth days †." The "righteous shall flourish like the palm tree; "he shall grow like a cedar in Lebanon. "Those that be planted in the house of the "Lord, shall flourish in the courts of our "God. They shall still bring forth fruit in "old age; they shall be fat and flourish-"ing. To shew that the Lord is upright— "he is my rock, and there is no unrighte-"ousness in him ‡."

To contemplate the relapses of an old man affects the heart with an uncommon sensibility; and particularly when we reflect that, though a young man may soon die, an old man *must*, in the common course of nature, cease to live, and that "there is no repentance in the grave." If

* Gen. xxvii. 33. † Prov. x. 27.
‡ Ps. xcii. 12.

we

we place before our eyes one instance of such fatal folly, we shall feel the full extent of the observation—"Did not Solomon, "King of Israel," says Nehemiah, "sin "by these things? Yet among many na- "tions was there no King like him, who "was beloved of his God, and God made "him King over all Israel: nevertheless "*even him* did outlandish women cause to "sin *." Disobedience to an express law of God darkened the lustre of the reign of Solomon. And alas! how many souls have suffered shipwreck from the same fatal offence! "How wise wast thou in "thy youth, and as a flood, filled with "understanding! Thy soul covered the "whole earth, and thou filledst it with "dark parables. Thy name went far unto "the islands, and for thy peace thou wast "beloved. Yet thou didst bow thy loins "unto women, and by thy body thou "wast brought into subjection. Thou didst "stain thy honour, and pollute thy seed, so "that thou broughtest wrath upon thy chil- "dren, and wast grieved for thy folly †."—

* Neh. xiii. 26. † Eccl. xlvii. 14, 15, 16. 19, 20.

MED. XIX.

How many, in this character of Solomon, may read their own! Instead of making his crimes an apology for sin, let them behold the despicable figure in which the King of Israel appears, in this description, and tremble for themselves. Youth itself is no excuse for such transgressions; but *old age* considerably magnifies the offence. "It "came to pass when Solomon *was old*, that "his wives turned away his heart after other "Gods; and his heart was not perfect be- "fore the Lord his God *." Thus did the same man, so inconsistent is human nature, and so little do we know to what lengths of sin we may be led, build an house, more sumptuous than was ever built before, to Jehovah, whom he loved, and fall down to worship vain, unprofitable idols, which he once hated.

In considering the relapse of Solomon, let us not forget our own. Corruption and temptation are still inhabitants of the world, and reside too frequently within our own breasts:—and oh thou aged and experienced man! dread the changes which *even thou*

* 1 Kings xi. 4.

mayest

mayest feel. Beware of "Ashtoreth the "Goddess of the Sidonians, and Milcom "the abomination of the Ammonites*." Beware of those enticing sins, by whatever favourite name they may be called, which, though they may have escaped thy youth, like an armed man may attack thine age, when the strength of thy body, and the powers of thy mind, may be less able to resist them. Thy Christian profession too, will rise up in double judgment, and condemn thee: for that informs thee, without any equivocation or reservation, that *they who do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God!* MED. XIX.

"Be thou, then, O Lord, within me, to "strengthen me; without me, to watch me; "under me, to hold me up; before me, to "lead me; behind me, to keep me back; "round about me, to keep off mine enemies "on every side†." Let me not trust in mine age, any more than in my youth. Let me not rely on any fancied exemption from relapsing into sin, on account either of the powers of my mind, or the strength of my body; for both imply weakness in respect of thee.

* 2 Kings xxiii. 13. † Bishop Andrews's Devotions.

MED. XIX.

thee.—"Let not the wise man glory in his "wisdom; neither let the mighty man glory "in his might; let not the rich man glory in "his riches: but let him that glorieth, glory "in this, that he understandeth and knoweth "ME, that I am the Lord which exerciseth "loving-kindness, judgment, and righteous-"ness in the earth: for in these things I de-"light, saith the Lord *."

* Jer. ix. 23, 24.

MEDITATION XX.

The Old Man's Perseverance in Holiness.

Hope travels *through,* nor quits us when we die.

POPE.

MED. XX.

WHEN we contemplate the *end* of a righteous old man, how calmly, how joyfully does the pious mind acquiesce in the dispensation of Providence! We take up the word and confirmation of the spirit of God himself, and exclaim "Blessed are the "dead which die in the Lord!—Yea, saith "the Spirit, for they rest from their la- "bours, and their works do follow them* !" The life of the *best* man is confessedly, in many respects, a life of labour and trou-

* Rev. xiv. 13.

ble,

MED. XX.

ble. Various are his outward conflicts; more various, and more distressing, are frequently his inward trials. A rest from these must at least afford a negative degree of happiness. And in consequence of this expectation, I have heard more than one of the family of affliction, wish for an happy removal to that region, where "the wicked cease from troubling, and the "*weary are at rest* *." But, let us reflect. This consideration *of itself* is unworthy of the great end to be accomplished by death. Mere negative happiness is not the happiness of heaven. The inspired writer carries our vision further—"their works do follow them." Whither? To the throne of God himself. They are not represented as carrying their *own* works, as pleading merit, or invoking indulgence. No. Their works do *follow* them, to be acknowledged by their just Judge, as genuine proofs of their Christian character, that they may receive such a reward as Divine Mercy has provided for those who shall have been *faithful unto death.*

* Job iii. 17.

Final

MED. XX.

Final perseverance is indeed an awful consideration; for great must be the labour, and great the grace which is able to accomplish it. If we look at this *end* from an early period of our lives, what longings after it must agitate the soul! If we contemplate it in the midst of our years, what dread! what perturbation!—for, impressed as we are, by the perfection of the blessed object of our faith, we cannot but feel, in our more serious moments, the infinite danger of so many relapses. From this point perhaps we *see* the goal, but we are far from having attained it. Our sensibility indeed may be yet keener, or rather our religious sense improved, and heightened, as our years advance: for our judgment being stronger, and our conviction more acute, our fears of miscarriage must necessarily increase. But these considerations, instead of checking our progress, must promote our everlasting interests. Even under the impression of fear itself, the righteous will never be forsaken.—"Behold! I send an angel "before thee," says God, "to keep thee "in the way, and to bring thee unto the "place

MED. XX. "place which I have prepared *."—My "grace is sufficient for thee ‡."—Travel forward, then, thou pilgrim! and *drink of the brook in the way.*

Again, if we reflect on final perseverance as we attain the limits of our journey, the prospect of the righteous old man will have acquired additional delights. The gloom of uncertainty is dissipated. His relapses into sin are fewer. His faith stronger. His hope still more and more confirmed. His expectation warmer, and every feeling impressed with a sort of divinity, an anticipation which he is as unable to describe, as, in former days, he was unable to comprehend.

But let us guard against an error respecting final perseverance, which has deluded many. The doctrine of final perseverance does not necessarily imply impeccability of conduct. I do not know that state of life, from the cradle to the grave, in which man may not fall from grace. This is the very essence of our nature. Not that an imaginary *fate* leads

* Ex. xxiii. 20. ‡ 2 Cor. xii. 9.

us

us inevitably to evil, but that the human will being left free to act, *may* degenerate into the most pernicious excesses. Original sin leaves a taint upon our souls. Voluntary transgression fixes it there. Divine grace, which removes the one, is competent also to remove the other. But if we *resist* grace, the possibility of which is a doctrine of Scripture, we concur in our own condemnation; and can no more reasonably cast a reproach on the mercy of God, than we can excuse, or palliate, our own offences. MED. XX.

If any be inclined to retain an opinion of final perseverance in the sense here alluded to, I fear, they deceive their own hearts, and the truth is not in them. *Unsinning man!*—I know not any such character: for if we look through the world with the most microscopic eye, we shall still have occasion to say with David, "I have seen an end of "all perfection *."—This must not be understood as an apology for human failings.—It may rather be considered as a caution against presumption; for however we may fail in our imperfect endeavours, perfection,

* Ps. cxix. 96.

we

MED. XX.

we are required, eagerly and earnestly to pursue. Perfection is the model which we should always have before our eyes. But what artist has been found that can surpass or rival the most perfect work of man?—Where then, shall we find him who can rival or surpass the most perfect work of God? God's moral perfections, as well as the productions of creation, are all inimitable. But that does not preclude them from being the supreme objects of man's attempt at imitation. "Be ye perfect, as your Father which is in "heaven is perfect*."—"Be ye merciful, "as your Father which is in heaven is mer-"ciful †."—The infinitude of God is not applicable to man; neither can man suppose it, in reflecting upon these texts. But he knows well that, the nearer he can approach the divine perfection, which he is solicited to do, and may accomplish by the divine help, the more surely and faithfully does he fulfil his Maker's will.

To conquer sin is his business in the world; nor can he expect to enter into everlasting life till he has made this conquest. But when

* Matt. v. 48. † Luke vi. 36.

this

this has been effected by the spiritual weapons placed within his hands, the aged Christian may then have his final perseverance in view. A rational and scriptural assurance takes place of a servile fear; and though the end be not yet come, he has no reason to be afraid of its approach. MED. XX.

The earthly model of every imitable perfection was *Christ*. Though essentially equal with the Father; for *this*, among other causes, he became man, and was made "*both* a sacrifice for sin, and also an ensample "of godly life."—"Be ye followers of me," says St. Paul, "even as I also am of Christ*." "The head of every man is Christ †." But Christ's perfections, though every man ought to imitate, no man can equal. "He did no "sin, neither was guile found in his mouth ‡." To imagine then, under any circumstances, that we can *do no sin*, is a degree of presumption, which never can proceed from the heart of a sound Christian; nor is it easy to conceive what imaginary combination of human virtues, or what peculiar construction of the human mind can suggest so impious an

* 1 Cor. iv. 16. † 1 Cor. xi. 3. ‡ 1 Pet. ii. 22.

assertion.

MED. XX.

assertion. We have all "sinned and come short of the glory of God *;" and if we are ever able to acquire that glory, or rise superior to that sin, it must not be in any imagined perfection of any spiritual attainments of "our own, but of him, who, of God, was "made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, "and sanctification, and redemption †."

Many excellent men, some of whom were distinguished by the approbation of God himself, were yet marked with defect and fault. David, who was called the man after God's own heart, recovering from a grievous offence, died in faith. Whether Solomon was restored to the degree of grace he had lost, is not clearly made known in Scripture; but from the reflections in his book of Ecclesiastes, it may reasonably be supposed, he was. Peter fell: but Peter had been assured by his divine Master—"Thou canst not follow me "now; but thou shalt follow me afterwards ‡;" and again, "When thou wast "young, thou girdest thyself, and walkedst "whither thou wouldest: but when thou shalt "be old, thou shalt stretch forth thine hands,

* Rom. ii. 22. † 1 Cor. i. 30. ‡ John xiii.

"and another shall gird thee, and carry thee "whither thou wouldest not. This spake he, "signifying by what death he should *glorify* "*God**." None of us will doubt these eminent instances of final perseverance. MED. XX.

Ecclesiastical history presents us with many more. When Ignatius was called to martyrdom, he founded a sure argument on the *fourscore and four years* that he had served Christ. When Latimer was brought before the Commissioners at Oxford, he declined a disputation with them on the controverted points of doctrine on account of his great age and infirmities, but his perseverance was undiminished. He knew his faith to have been founded on a rock, when his judgment and his intellect were in their full force and vigour; and therefore he met the flame with exultation. Cranmer, the bulwark of the Reformation, recanted in an evil hour. But will his perseverance be suspected, when we behold the tear run down his venerable cheek, and hear him disavow his momentary apostacy?—"Always since I have lived hitherto," said he, "I have been a hater of falsehood,

* John xxi. 18, 19.

"and

MED. XX.

" and a lover of simplicity, and never before " this have I dissembled."—At the stake, stretching out his arm, he put his right hand into the flame. With eyes lifted up to heaven, he oftentimes repeated " This hand hath " offended ; oh this unworthy right hand !" at the same time using the words of St. Stephen, " Lord Jesus ! receive my spirit."

This was final perseverance : and, O my God, when I am laid upon the bed of death, recollecting my past transgressions, and repenting of my former offences, may I be animated by the same principles of an holy faith, and may such final perseverance be mine !

MEDITATION XXI.

On Weariness of Life.

Virtue!—She, wonder-working goddess! charms
That *rock* to bloom——————and gives
To life's sick nauseous *iteration* change!
Virtue, which Christian motives best inspire!
And *bliss*, which Christian schemes alone insure!

YOUNG.

MED. XXI.

A DECAY of bodily powers, frequently, but not necessarily, produces great weakness and infirmity of mind. But as the indisposition of the one may be cured, or improved, by medicine, the melancholy and sometimes fatal consequences of the other may be alleviated, or removed, by the application of salutary reflection and moral discipline. Man is not the object of mechanical experiment; neither does his personal happiness depend upon the conformation of figure, or the acci-

MED. XXI.

dental construction of any of his animal operations. I mean, so far as actual derangement of body, does not occasion absolute derangement of mind.

It is certain, however, that a connection, and a close one too, subsists between the body and the mind. But it is also certain that the all-wise Parent of man, in the appointment of this connection, has offered a remedy in the appointment itself; and our spiritual part, under the Divine Grace, is able to controul, conquer, and subdue, whatever may be found, in the structure of our frame, productive of individual misery.

The passions of men perhaps may form a specious argument in opposition to this observation. But it must be remarked, that it is the excess or perversion of passion, not *its existence* that can afford any plea against it. For the passions, abstractedly considered, are favourable to virtue; and those which are most congenial to the body, must be regulated by the mind. They offend therefore both against natural and revealed law, when they usurp a despotic, unreasonable, and uncontrouled dominion over the whole man.

But if the passions do not naturally produce

duce uneasiness, it may be objected that, the *temper* may. To this we reply that, the temper is not the mind; it is only a quality or disposition of mind, and requires regulation, as much as any other natural dispensation of Providence. Indeed, in its natural state, it is an emanation of man's imperfection; a strong and distinctive mark of corruption, to be amended only by those means which pure religion offers. Whether therefore the passions and affections, or the temper and disposition, be the proper medium of operation between mind and body, it is clearly essential to human happiness that each be the most excellent of its kind. MED. XXI.

This will be very apparent at that period of life when the bodily powers begin to fail, and the mental vigour to languish and decay. The novelty of life is over. Its very changes tire. We hear the words of Job repeated—"Oh! that I were as in months past *!"—But regret settles into carelessness of life. Weariness and lassitude accompany the discontented, on whom piety and virtue make no impression. The language of the same

* Job xxix. 2.

MED. XXI.

sufferer in the day of his despondency, again assaults our ears—"Wherefore is light given "to him that is in misery, and life unto the "bitter of soul; which long for death but it "cometh not, and dig for it more than for "hid treasures; which rejoice exceedingly, "and are glad when they can find the grave* ?" Oh! thoughtless and unprincipled! What! weary of one of God's most valuable gifts! weary of receiving instruction in that way which he thinks best for you! Though you may be weary of suffering, for the flesh may allowably be weak under sufferings, yet ought the spirit of infirmity to bow before the good pleasure of the Lord. Though all are not disciplined in the same school of affliction, yet *the heart* of every man "*knoweth its own bitterness* †;" and it is a truth well understood by the *Christian* sufferer that, we *must*, like much better men than we are, "*through* "*much tribulation* enter *into the kingdom of* "*God* ‡."

But is weariness of life attached to the *sufferer* only? Are all others, supported in

* Job iii. 20, 21, 22. † Prov. xiv. 10.

‡ Acts xiv. 22.

strength

strength of constitution and hilarity of spirits, willing to tread over and over again the gay meadows they have past, to hear again the oft repeated chearful tale, and, as in the days of youth, to *chaunt* once more *to the sound of the viol?* Alas! the gay scene is fled. Time has eradicated, if not the remembrance, the capacity of enjoyment. An unwelcome stiffness has taken possession of the limbs, a more benumbing apathy presses on the mind. Not having marked the change, they are astonished at themselves. They have, it is true, seen others grow old; but the prospect was either too remote from them, or the object not sufficiently interesting to attract their attention. They have been told indeed that gray hairs and sober conduct are fit companions for each other; but as neither sobriety of behaviour, a calm, collected, tranquillity of manners, nor even the playfulness of innocence have been acknowledged acquaintances, they are left, like Wolsey, *weary and old in service, to the mercy of a rude wave that must for ever hide them.*— Do they not blush to read of the contented resignation of the aged Barzillai? He truly

MED. XXI.

truly estimated the condition of life, and resigned himself to its changes. He neither regretted comforts which he could no longer enjoy, nor desired the possession of offices which he could no longer perform. —"I am this day fourscore years old; "and can I discern between good and "evil? can thy servant taste what I eat "or what I drink? can I hear any more "the voice of singing men and singing "women? Wherefore then should thy ser- "vant be yet a servant to my Lord the "King?—Let thy burthen turn back again "that I may die in mine own city, and be "buried by the grave of my father, and of "my mother*."—An old man thus retiring from public duty, full of religious comfort, satisfied, but not disgusted with life, looking back without regret, and looking forward with an assured hope, is an enviable and an envied object; and of him it may be truly said, as of the same Wolsey, and surely with much more propriety, *Nothing in his life became him like the leaving of it.*

* 2 Sam. xix. 35, 37.

There

There is a rich treasure in the very worst constitution of nature, which disposes the mind of man, unwarped by malevolent and excessive *passion*, unsullied by morbid feeling and ungracious *temper*, not only to acquiesce, but to delight in the thoughts of change. A pious old man feels this dispensation of Providence in a very high degree. *Virtue*—that is, the fruit of that holy faith which has so long been his support in the wilderness of the world is, as the religious poet observes, *that wonder-working goddess* who makes even the barren *rock* to display variety of beauties, and offers the most agreeable alternatives to the *sick*, and, too frequently disgusting *iteration* of human life. MED. XXI.

This reflection, under discreet regulation, will remove the most distressing weariness of condition. Natural objects, from frequent repetition, lose their interest. After a minute inspection of their properties, and a complete knowledge of their qualities, admiration ceases. Spiritual desires, ever varying with those uses to which they are applied, preserve perpetual novelty. There is an end in *prospect*, to be

MED. XXI.

accomplished only by the varied application of our spiritual duties. The love of God is ever new. The contemplation of him ever delightful. As the astronomer multiplies his power of vision, and discovers at a greater, and a greater, distance, new worlds unseen before, so the pious man, by the effect of revelation on his intellectual faculties, increases *his* vision of the Almighty; he ranges over vast fields of bliss, and beholds an extent of happiness as unlimited as eternity.

"Come unto me all ye that are *weary* "*and heavy laden*, and I will give you "rest*."—Weary with the labour of life, and oppressed by variety of wretchedness. "Thus saith the Lord, I have satiated the "*weary soul*, and replenished every sor-"rowful soul. Upon this I awaked," says the comforted Jeremiah, "and beheld; "and my sleep was sweet unto me†." To be comforted from above, in the midst of weariness and painfulness, is indeed an happy privilege which none but our Supreme Comforter can bestow, and none but

* Matt. xi. 28. † Jer. xxxi. 25, 26.

his

his faithful and obedient creature can re- MED. XXI.
ceive. This, then, which is the confidence of every age, is peculiarly the staff and support of our declining years.

The old man, thus cherished, is willing to forego what he has so long enjoyed that he is fully satiated with it, the world, with all its vanities and all its pleasures. And under this impression we may reasonably conclude that the principle which induces tottering age to cling so close to this life, or rather to abhor the thoughts of death, does not so much arise from deprivations of any kind, as from a want of security, and a lively sense of that which is to come. There can be no weariness of life, where our trust is placed upon a sure foundation. This is truly the great secret of human happiness. "For when a "man (as an ancient author somewhere ex- "presses it) has seen the vicissitudes of "night and day, winter and summer, spring "and autumn, the returning faces of the "several parts of nature, what is their fur- "ther to detain his fancy here below?

"The spectacle indeed is glorious, and "may bear viewing several times. But "in a very few scenes of revolving years,

"we

MED. XXI.

" we feel a satiety of the same images, " the mind grows impatient to see the " curtain drawn, and behold new scenes " disclosed, and the imagination is in this " life filled with a confused idea of the " next.

" Death, considered in this light, is no " more than passing from one entertain- " ment to another. If the present objects " are grown tiresome and distasteful, it is " in order to prepare our minds for a " more exquisite relish of those which are " fresh and new. If the good things we " have hitherto enjoyed are transient, they " will be succeeded by those which the " inexhaustible power of the Deity will " supply to eternal ages. If the pleasures " of our present state are blended with " pain and uneasiness, our future will " consist of pure and unmixed delights. " Blessed hope! the thought whereof turns " the very imperfections of our nature into " occasions of comfort and joy *."

Let my every hour be filled with thoughts of Thee, my God and Saviour! and in

* Guardian, No. 170.

acting

acting according to thy will; and then, *weariness of life* will never be present with me. Let me reflect, who *went about doing good*, who *prayed whole nights upon the mountain*, who *watched and fasted in the desart*, who was *never weary in well-doing*, and that I may inquire of mine own heart, what right have I to complain in the language of discontent; and, in the morning say, *would God it were evening; and in the evening, would God it were morning!*—"The "Lord is in his holy temple; let all the "earth keep silence before him*." MED. XXI.

* Heb. ii. 20.

MEDI-

MEDITATION XXII.

On Weariness of Life.

Wait the great teacher, Death; and God adore.
POPE.

MED. XXII.

DID we thoroughly understand the full import and meaning of this one word, *wait*, no day, no hour, would hang heavily on our hands. *He that waiteth* hath an object in view; and the more important that object, the more interest will he take in the expectation. If we have no adequate object of our pursuit, a tedious languor seizes upon our spirits. Weariness of life succeeds indolence of thought; the inevitable consequence of which is misery. "It would "seem strange perhaps," observes a pious writer, "to say that it is a sin to be mi- "serable, and that it is a sin not to be "happy;

" happy; yet," he adds, " when narrowly " examined, I believe it will appear to be " no stranger than true: for the effect must " needs partake of the cause, and misery " must therefore be undoubtedly sinful." MED. XXII.

The argument of Mr. Howe * is so apposite to my present purpose that I feel myself excused for detailing it. " There are two " sorts of miseries incident to mankind; the " one not to be avoided, and therefore to " be pitied; the other is to be remedied, and " therefore inexcusable. The former sort " are such as are occasioned by bodily in- " dispositions; the latter are the diseases " of a vicious mind. To the miseries of " a distempered body we are enslaved by " nature; to those of a distempered mind " we voluntarily submit. In the first case " we want power to break our chain; but, " in the latter, we want will to obtain our " freedom. I think it cannot be denied, " that it is a sin to be miserable through " the vice of the mind; since it is appa- " rent, that those miseries generally pro- " ceed either from desiring things vicious

* Howe's Meditation XC.

" or

MED. XXII.

" or impossible, or from fearing and dread-
" ing things natural or unavoidable; in
" all which we are guilty of disobeying or
" repining at the will of God, to which
" we ought chearfully, and in all humility
" to submit: for, by desiring things vi-
" cious, we discover our disobedience; by
" desiring things impossible, we demon-
" strate our impiety; and by dreading
" things natural and unavoidable, we be-
" tray our infidelity. Thus it being proved
" that it is a sin to be miserable, it will
" follow, by an undeniable consequence,
" that it is a sin not to be happy. It is
" evident that true happiness consists in
" such a peaceful tranquillity and content-
" ment of mind, as is neither to be ruffled
" by fear, nor discomposed by desire.
" And it is as certain, that such a blessed
" temper can never be attained without
" faith, love, obedience, and submission, in
" their several relations to God, and all of
" them to a great perfection. Now hap-
" piness resulting from the union of these
" virtues, and the want of any one of
" them being sinful, it must be granted,
" that *it is a sin not to be happy.*"

If

MED. XXII.

If this argument be conclusive, how justly then are those condemned, who, (as we may express it) *sin God's mercies*, and complain of weariness of life. From whatever cause bodily uneasiness arises, it is plainly the cause of sin, if it either influence the passions, or irritate the temper to a point inconsistent with pure religion. I do not expect man to be a stoic, and avow pain to be no evil. Human infirmities will communicate themselves to human feelings. But it is our duty to controul the severest pangs of nature, and to use every endeavour to mitigate the inevitable calamities of life, by those means which a kind Providence has not denied us. Here Christianity avails us much. Indeed here Christianity is every thing; for Christian motives are the only refuge under the penalties of nature or the pressure of declining years. "Seeing then that we have a great "high priest that is passed into the hea- "vens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold "fast our profession. For we have not an "high priest who cannot be touched with "the feeling of our infirmities; but was in "all points tempted like as we are, yet "with-

MED. XXII.

"without sin. Let us therefore come boldly "unto the throne of grace, that we may ob- "tain mercy, and find grace to help in time "of need *."

The same argument will apply itself to mental uneasiness, when it arises from an insufficient cause. It is in vain to offer argument to malady. The cure of the mind's natural disease must come from another quarter. But that weariness of life which is produced by an habitual gloominess of temper is capable of removal, and by the grace of God may be checked in any stage of its progress. In old persons these symptoms of uneasiness are not uncommon. The progressive encroachments of distemper on the constitutions of the aged, and the debility which they must necessarily experience, sometimes generate an accumulation of unpleasant feelings. Let no man say that, any period is too late to attempt a regulation of the mind, or to pour comfort on a distressed soul, however advanced in life. Hard and callous as we may imagine an old and inveterate offender, he would

* Heb. iv. 14, 15, 16.

not be the first that had been delivered, of those *who, through fear of* the consequences *of death,* had been *all their life-time subject to bondage.* To hear an old man complain that *wearisome nights had been appointed unto him,* will excite no surprize; but in the good old man, such complaints will leave no unpleasant consequences; such weariness will produce no symptoms of discontent. His Saviour's sufferings are the subject of his contemplations and his Saviour's bosom the place of his repose, the object of his reward. He takes up the words of Job in all the confidence of hope, "All the days of "my appointed time will I wait till my "change come. Thou shalt call and I will "answer thee *."— MED. XXII.

This complaint of weariness too sometimes arises from pure vanity, and sometimes from pure vacancy, of mind. In both cases it is a sin which easily besets the sons of men. That refinement of manners which produces this affected weariness of life, ought to be reprobated by every sound member of society; and those who are

* Job xiv. 14, 15.

MED. XXII.

under the impression of this dangerous principle, if they cannot, in the first instance, be convinced of the malignity of the sin, should be cast into contempt by the folly of the situation. But *folly* is too mild a term; for the affected effeminate should be told that without labour there is not only no reward, but certain and inevitable punishment. Before we adopt the weariness of vanity, or that *tædium vitæ*, which is the result of vacuity of thought, let us inquire, whether we have done all that *may become a man*. So long as one study to improve the heart remains, so long as one tear is unwiped within our sphere of action, away with vanity and away with vacancy. We have not fulfilled the duties of our station, and our weariness is the deserved return of our neglect.

—Take another reproof. When weariness of life increases with age (allowing always for the natural weakness of the mental faculty) we may rest assured that there is a miserable defect of *principle*. "Lord! "increase our faith"—was the prayer even of a faithful disciple. If there be a want of faith in the aged, or if their faith, formerly weak and perhaps unsettled, does not increase

crease with their years, we not not be surprized to behold lassitude in every limb, and weariness in every heart. MED. XXII.

It is pure principle alone which rectifies these errors, or vices of the mind. Without this, weariness of spirit plunges the wicked into the very depth of suicide: with it, the good are raised to the sublimest happiness of heaven. So many delightful reflections crowd upon the mind of the pious in the decline of life, as to eradicate the deepest impression of mental weakness. They forget their pains, and think only of their mercies. The mercy of being born in a land of Christians—the mercy of being educated in a true profession of the faith—the mercy of having been called from a life of sin and sorrow to that of holiness and the fear of God—the mercies of youth and of riper years—and last of all, the mercy of a religious old age, and the glorious prospect of dying the death of the righteous, are true and wholesome medicines sufficient to expel weariness from the faintest breast.

If it be thought that the consideration of religion hath sometimes produced weariness of life and gloominess of imagination,

MED. XXII.

let it fairly be understood that *pure* religion acknowledges no such principles. The best of human viands may be converted to poison; but the danger is not in the substance, but in the preparation. A dejected soul may, through sin, be justly dejected; but remove the impediment and the patient walks—"Lord! if thou wilt, thou canst make "me clean. Jesus said, I will; be thou "clean: and immediately the leprosy was "cleansed *."

Thus relieved, the body is no more a burthen, nor the mind a trouble. Weakness and weariness may remind us of the long journey of life, but they will not break us down in the midst of our years. "Our "head will not be an aching head, nor our "heart an aching heart:" but the most venerable of aged men may say, "I enjoy that "felicity, which gives to days the rapidity "of moments, and to moments the value "of ages †."

May religious industry occupy so much of my future time, as to leave no room for

* Matt. viii. 2.

† Weiland's Agathon. apud Dutensiasa.

weari-

weariness! If I slacken in my pace, impell me with thy spirit—if I faint, revive me with thy love. The spirit indeed may be willing, but the flesh may be weak. In *both* may I serve Thee; that I may rise from the bed of death refreshed by the multitude of thine everlasting comforts, O my blessed Saviour and Redeemer! MED. XXII.

MEDI-

MEDITATION XXIII.

The Old Man's Infirmities of Mind.

This is old age.—Thou must outlive
Thy youth, thy strength, thy beauty which will change
To wither'd, weak and gray; thy senses then
Obtuse, all taste of pleasure must forego
To what thou hast, and for the air of youth
Hopeful and chearful, in thy blood will reign
A melancholy damp of cold and dry
To weigh thy spirits down, and last consume
The balm of life. MILTON.

MED. XXIII.

AS death is the natural consequence of life, infirmities, the harbingers of death, are the inevitable portion of old age. From the circumstances of natural constitution or accidental habit, there may be a difference in the degree of suffering, but the lot of protracted life must be that of many infirmities. The descriptive pen of Milton notices the change which takes place in the human frame in

in a very striking manner; and the aged, those who have declined far into the vale of life, would sigh over the description, if divine Providence, which always deals kindly with the children of men, had not taken away the sting of reflection by removing, in a great measure, the feeling which would occasion it. *The withered, weak, and gray* would indeed *weigh down the spirits and consume the balm of life*, if the senses, at that remote period of existence, were not rendered so *obtuse*, as hardly, if at all, to perceive the change.

I would not by any means be thought to urge that there is pleasure in insensibility, or that the personal comfort of the aged arises wholly from their want of feeling. If that were the case, reverence of age would be no longer a duty. The preservation of the animal machine from hurt or damage would be the only care of those of mature years, who are called upon to protect and cherish the last remains of parental life: or perhaps we might be justified in following the example of Gentoo-affection in placing the decaying body on the border of some rapid stream that would soon sweep it into the ocean of eternity.

MED. XXIII.

But this is not exactly the case. We must take facts as they occur; and we shall then perceive that enough of feeling remains in the constitution of aged persons to give comfort to a state attended with infirmity; and yet so transient is the apprehension of evil, so short-lived the grief, that the depredation which might be expected from the pressure of natural weakness, is seldom attended with very unhappy consequences. When a sudden agitation arises in an old man's mind, the current overflows: but the current soon runs off. Nature exhausts itself; and leaves, if not always a *complacency*, an ease, or indolence of thought, which no longer interrupts the ordinary avocations of life. This is that obtuseness which, if any old person perceive in himself, he must attribute to a natural cause; and not condemn his own conduct for not feeling in a more exquisite manner, what Providence in its wisdom hath ordered otherwise. This too must be the charitable construction of other men, when they remark the apparent insensibility of declining age.

But there are infirmities which an old man feels, that may be corrected by a proper application of his mental powers. Even feeling itself

itself may be improved, and kept alive, by reflection and collected meditation. If he be sensible, in Milton's expression, of "a "melancholy damp of cold and dry," his first object will be to restore his spirits to an equilibrium, by endeavouring to produce in his own heart, through every moral and religious means, a perfect unanimity of mind. "An even mind," says Dr. Young, "unde- "jected by ill, unelated by good, is an ad- "vice the wise heathens inculcated as much, "if not more than any other. Nor has Scrip- "ture shewn it less regard. No single piece "of wisdom seems to me so guarded there "as this equanimity. Two noble barriers "are erected against our deviation on either "hand: one in the history of Solomon, who "to suppress elevation, assures us that the "best is vain; one in the history of Job, "who tells us that the worst is supportable*." But, above all other examples of patient suffering, who was he that "endured the cross, "despising the shame †? Who when he was "reviled, reviled not again ‡?"—Who never

MED. XXIII.

* Correspondence with Richardson, vol. ii. p. 10.

† Heb. xii. 2. ‡ 1 Pet. ii. 23.

opened

MED. XXIII.

opened his mouth against those who cruelly and undeservedly scourged his body, and took every opportunity to irritate and perplex his mind? Look upon *him*, my venerable friends! when you have reason to suspect the stability of your hearts, when you find your spirits moved within you by any trifling, or even any serious, discomposure. Look upon *him*, mild, placid, collected, and composed; and "let the same mind be in you "which was also in Christ Jesus *." This is the only temper that can conquer infirmity from the cradle to the grave.

The acuteness of bodily pain, or an irritation of the nervous system, will produce a sensible uneasiness in the human frame; a feeling, which, in old persons, is frequently attended with considerable inconvenience.—If this feeling may not be described, it is no less an evil both to the sufferer, and to those most interested in the personal happiness of the sufferer. It is indeed the disease of a delicate mind, and therefore particularly deserving of compassion. But like other diseases, it should be remembered that it admits,

* Phil. ii. 5.

if

if not of a total cure, of a salutary melio- MED. XXIII.
ration. The mind unchecked, becomes a wild wilderness, and is frequented by more troublesome visitors than even the fierce and untamed rangers of the forest. The uneasy mind recoils upon itself; every unhappy sensation centres there. Apprehension raises a train of dismal followers, which slaughter comfort at every blow. When the old man's mind is equal to the combat, it is his duty to curb these painful feelings; and like all other warfare, the sooner he attempts the conquest, the more successful will his arms be. Time gives stability to the invader; and every unsubdued infirmity multiplies its own danger.

Peevishness and irritability of temper, so unpleasant a possession and so unhappy in their consequences, cannot but be sensibly felt by those who labour under the impression of them. They would be glad no doubt to be rid of such uneasy guests; and to feel that complacency, which alone can soften the natural evils of life, and supply that *balm* which is the solace of declining years.—But they do not begin the reformation of their minds upon true principles. They either vindicate their motive like Jonah,

and

MED. XXIII.

and exclaim "I do well to be angry*;" or else they consider their behaviour as a cloud no larger than a man's hand; a trifling obscuration of better qualities; a circumstance arising from natural constitution; an inconvenience, it may be, but they will not acknowledge it as a fault. In short, they consider it merely as a *temper*, they do not consider it as a *sin*. Here a serious reflection intervenes. An habit of the mind, not originally sinful, may yet, from indulgence, or the want of restriction, participate in more serious offences. The natural expression of pain is doubtless no sin. In many instances it is an allowable, indeed it is an involuntary, emotion, and may contribute to sooth many an acute sensation. But this very expression of pain, unwearied and incessant, harasses the animal frame, depresses the spirits with a tenfold weight, produces forms of speech inconsistent with Christian fortitude, excites ideas repugnant to the love of God, and makes a ruin, a dismal ruin, of a venerable mind.

In a recent publication of the private correspondence of two amiable females, the

* Jonah iv. 9.

con-

confession and the reproof do equal credit to them both.—"I am convinced now *bad nerves* "(as one is pleased to call the indulgence "of humour) are little short of a mortal "sin. They disgrace one's best principles, "grieve one's best friends, and make one's "whole being ungrateful.—Extenuate as "kindly as you will, no effects of an illness "however severe, no uniformity of life, no "petty cares and attentions, can totally ex- "cuse such a disposition." The reply is admirable. "My intention was to remove "the painful imagination that there was "any thing voluntary in an inactivity, the "mere effect of the constitutional disor- "der.—I see with the deepest concern how "sadly the fatal influence of distemper has "misapplied a good intention to a discon- "tent with yourself, which, if not vigour- "ously opposed will wear away every guilt- "less enjoyment of your life; weaken all "the spirits of your virtues, and by an un- "available regret of not being able to do "all you wish, will incapacitate you from "doing all you can. Your mind, my dear "friend, has the disposition of angelic na- "tures; but your constitution has also, too "much

MED. XXIII.

MED. XXIII.

" much of the weakness of frail mortality to " assist you in all the high attempts at which " your virtue aims. In this state of imper- " fection, the kind and extent of our duties " must be regulated by the extent of our ani- " mal powers. To these, beyond a certain " degree, no effort of resolution can make the " least addition : and you might just as " reasonably accuse yourself of not being " able to fly, when by flying no doubt you " might in many instances be exceedingly " useful, as for not performing many other " tasks, which though they are in general " not quite so uncommon, are to you upon " the same principle, equally impractica- " ble *."—It is a satisfaction to know that the excellent lady whose ingenuous acknowledgment so greatly interests us, sustained the slow approach of a mortal disease with a silent and an endearing patience, and resigned her soul into her Maker's hands under the highest sense of Christian duty. It is also grateful to reflect that her friend and the kind reprover of a delicate and highly

* Mrs. E. Carter's Letters to, and from Mrs. C. Talbot, vol. i. p. 513. 4to. edit.

cultivated mind, afforded, through a long life, the most amiable example of a composed and quiet spirit.—"The souls of the "righteous are in the hands of God, and "*there* shall no torment touch them*." MED. XXIII.

I would here close my meditation, breathing only one short prayer for a similar placidity of mind; but that I feel myself impelled to state the unpleasant consequences of an opposite behaviour. Close as the natural ties of men are drawn, and warm as the blood of kindred flows towards each other, all may be dashed with misery by peevishness and irritation. A parent's kindness may long hold out, under such circumstances, towards his child. Hope throws out many a reviving ray, and it is not till after repeated and inveterate offences of this nature that a parent's kindness is subdued. But affection does not always so readily ascend. The attraction of old age is not like the attraction of youth. An unaccommodating mind, joined to unaccommodating manners, is ungenial and repulsive. Dissatisfaction with well-intended services alienates the affection

* Wisd. iii. 1.

of

MED. XXIII.

of friends, and perpetual exacerbation of mind makes the man himself unhappy.

Many arguments of mitigation may be used on both sides; and doubtless, on both sides, great allowances must be made. To "*bear* and *forbear*," is a moral principle, which rests upon the sound foundation of Christian duty. Besides, this mental irritation is *infirmity*; and under that consideration, on one side the provocation should be forgiven; on the other, for the same reason, it should be restrained. There is an high duty to be exacted of both; for *charity*, and above all, the charities of private life, the reciprocal attentions of father, son and brother, *suffer long and are kind*. Such *charity never faileth*, but is productive of the sweetest emotions of family friendship and domestic tenderness. When the old man hath out-lived *his youth*, *his strength*, *his beauty*, when he rallies the infirmities of his body and does not aggravate those of his mind, when the motives of pure religion incorporate themselves with every action, and Christ becomes the harmony of his soul, then all uneasiness and irritability of temper immediately subside; his attentive offspring form

form all his temporal pleasure and delight; he rejoices in their manly years and more than manly conduct; he forgets the decrepitude of age in the prospect of immortal youth; he looks back on past joys without regret; is satiated with life and all its changes; receives, with a thankful and a believing heart, his Saviour's comforts, and—"finds rest unto his soul."

MED. XXIII.

Should protracted age or an increased degree of bodily infirmity be my lot, let me not forget the indispensable duty of rendering my situation as little troublesome as I can to the kind friends who shall administer to my wants. Let me receive their assistance with reciprocal benevolence, and repay their kindness with the warmest gratitude.—"A "man that hath friends must shew himself "*friendly;* and there is a friend that stick-"eth closer than a brother*."

* Prov. xviii. 24.

MEDITATION XXIV.

The Old Man's Infirmities of Body.

Then let the trial come! and witness thou
If terror be upon me; if I shrink
To meet the storm, or faulter in my strength
When hardest it besets me. Do not think
That I am fearful and infirm of soul
As late thy eyes beheld: for thou hast chang'd
My nature; thy commanding voice has wak'd
My languid powers to bear me boldly on,
Where'er the will divine my paths ordains
Through toil or peril; only do not thou
Forsake me; oh be thou for ever near,
That I may listen to thy sacred voice,
And guide by thy decrees my constant feet.
But say, *For ever are my eyes bereft?*
O thou eternal arbiter of things!
Be thy great bidding done: for who am I
To question thy appointment?—

AKENSIDE.

MED. XXIV. FORTITUDE, *Christian* fortitude, can never be held in higher estimation as a car-

dinal virtue, than when it is exerted to sustain the inevitable evils of human life. Pain of mind is frequently the result of pain of body. How greatly are these aggravated by an unaccommodating and undisciplined old age!—Oh! my soul! be thou ready and prepared, when the hand of the Almighty presses upon thee in personal sufferings. "It "is good for me that I have been in trouble. "Before I was troubled I went wrong.—"Thou art good and gracious, oh teach "me thy statutes *!" MED. XXIV.

Thus armed, let us go forward *in the spirit;* and with bold intrepid breast, let us meet the rising storm.

"Then let the trial come! and witness thou
"If terror be upon me"—

To what purpose have so many years passed over our heads, so many thoughts rested in our minds, so many lessons of instruction been received into our hearts, so many warnings, awful and not to be mistaken warnings, given, if all are in vain at the moment when their value is the greatest? Let us reflect

* Ps. cxix.

MED. XXIV.

on that interesting point at which we are now arrived. We have seen the old man bowed towards the earth; we have beheld his tottering step and heard his feeble voice. We have witnessed his increasing infirmities. His abridged walk, his prolonged slumbers, his *lack-lustre* eye, and unsteady paralytic hand are all before us. "We see time's furrows on "another's brow." The chronic pain is not unnoticed; and the decaying powers speak a language as intelligible—may it be with more effect!—than the hand-writing on the wall to the King of Babylon in the midst of his fatal revels. Here then we stand, and—*are what we deplore*. "I have been young, and "now am old"—is the basis of much sound meditation. At no period of life have we found ourselves exempt from sufferings. Why then should we expect to do so in old age?—

"What does not fade? The tower that long hath stood
"The crush of thunder and the warring winds,
"Shook by the slow but sure destroyer Time,
"Now hangs in doubtful ruins o'er its base*."

These are general observations; but they

* Armstrong.

ought

ought to produce *particular* conclusions. We may admire the poetry, but let us improve the moral. The progressive inroad of time that hath swept others down, is now washing our own foundation. The event we cannot escape; but the consequences of the event, prosperous or adverse, we must ascribe to ourselves. "All things come alike to all; "there is one event to the righteous and to "the wicked, to the good and to the clean "and to the unclean; to him that sacrificeth, "and to him that sacrificeth not:" but of "those who sleep in the dust of the earth, "some shall awake to everlasting life, and "some to shame and everlasting contempt *."

MED. XXIV.

The state of old age is undoubtedly obnoxious to many infirmities of body. The old man, in some degree or other, *must* feel them.—His most important care ought to be that he feel them *well;* that is, that he do not accumulate unnecessary misery by aggravating those evils which he cannot avoid. Evils, which are beyond the help of man, I will not now call to his remembrance. When we lose *reason* from the helm, our actions are not our

* Eccles. ix. 2. Dan. xii. 2.

own,

MED. XXIV.

own. We may retain a strength of body when the mind is sunk beneath a cloud. A glimmering too of reason may remain when almost every part of the animal frame is lost in irrecoverable debility. These are indeed cases of profound submission. "This is thy "hand, and thou, Lord, hast done it*."

But there are circumstances of body, which, as they add considerable weight to the infirmities of old age, require those alleviations of mind which flow only from the pure principles of religious duty. Every period of human life, no doubt, is subject to these incidental inflictions. But youth and health can meet them with a bold brow, and with an unclouded imagination. Hope never deserts the young, and fear is seldom admitted into their hearts. With greater tenderness let us regard the old, and endeavour to soften the affliction which we cannot avert.

While we reflect on the calamities of advanced life, Milton's Lazar-house appears before us—

"Wherein are laid,
"Numbers of all diseased, all maladies."

* Ps. cix. 27.

In

In contemplating the scene, we feel as Adam did at the relation— MED. XXIV.

> " Sight so deform, what heart of rock could long
> " Dry-eyed behold? Adam could not, but wept."

We weep; but it is to shed balm upon the miserable. It is to " strengthen the weak " hands, and confirm the feeble knees: it is " to say to them that are of a feeble heart, " be strong—he will come and save you— " then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, " and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped; " then shall the lame man leap as an hart, " and the tongue of the dumb shall sing *." The miracles of nature which were accomplished by the Messiah, still spiritually exist in the miracles of divine grace. The blind, the deaf, the lame, the dumb, though they are not now the objects of a miraculous interposition as to their bodily infirmities, claim and receive the kind offices of a still, and ever, merciful Deliverer. Let us pass them in review before us, connected with that state when old age is supposed to heighten infirmity.

Old age and *blindness*, contemplated at

* Is. xxxv. 3, 4, 5.

a dis-

MED. XXIV.

a distance, doubtless, produce heavy and melancholy thought. "Light is sweet, and "a pleasant thing it is for the eyes to behold "the sun *." Though the alternative be sometimes disputed, surely sight is the most valuable of all the external senses. It is an inlet of continual pleasure; it is an inlet of continual instruction. The loss of *Heaven's first created beam* has been warmly deplored; and though the good man may feel reconciled to this great deprivation, on pure and substantial motives, still, if he might indulge a wish, he would wish *to see.* But blindness and old age are sometimes necessarily connected. The aged eye will be dim; and worldly prospects will naturally fade. Is there no consolation? Yes, the eye of the soul is enlightened by an heavenly ray. "God is light, and in him is no dark-"ness at all. If we say that we have fellow-"ship with him, and walk in darkness, we "lie, and do not the truth; but if we "walk in the light, as he is in the light, we "have fellowship one with another, and the "blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us "from all sin †." Spiritual light can dissipate

* Eccles. xi. 7. † 1 John i. 5, 6, 7.

the

the palpable darkness even of a *total eclipse*. Under this conviction, "the glory that shall "be revealed in him" becomes the present source of the blind man's joy. Though "the "sun be no more thy light by day, neither "for brightness shall the moon give light "unto thee, yet shall the Lord be unto thee "an everlasting light, and thy God thy "glory. Thy *spiritual* sun shall no more "go down; neither shall thy moon with-"draw itself; for the Lord shall be thy ever-"lasting light, and the days of thy mourning "shall be ended *."

MED. XXIV.

To the contemplative mind, the obscurity of earthly vision is indeed attended with incalculable advantages. One source of temptation is wholly cut off. What does not enter by the eye? We read of *the lust of the eyes*, and *eyes full of adultery*. Who will regret the loss of such sensations? Who but will rejoice at their deliverance from such seductions? Old as we may be, we are not exempt from the dangers of a covetous, an envious, or an evil eye. A sound and ingenious reply was given by a person to his

* Is. lx. 19, 20.

friend,

MED. XXIV.

friend, who lamented the loss of *one* of his eyes; who enquired, "Whether he regretted "the eye which was lost, or that which re- "mained?" "Weep rather," said he, "for "the enemy that stays behind, than for the "enemy that is gone."

It is the description of an unregenerate soul that, the *eyes of his understanding are darkened.* A state, how much more dreadful, than the loss of bodily sight!—for "he "that walketh in darkness knoweth not "whither he goeth." Rejoice, ye pious blind! that ye can *see God.* "I am come," said your Saviour, "a light into the world "that whosoever believeth on me should not "abide in darkness; but shall have the light "of life *." The vision of the Almighty is before you. Look up—"for God hath "opened your eyes, and turned them from "darkness to light, from the power of Satan "unto himself †." Here meditation has its full effect. Not distracted by the eye of vanity, ye can *think down hours to moments.*—Not drawn aside by a multitude of frivolous occurrences, one great object occupies your

* John xii. 35, 46. Ib. viii. 12.

† Acts xxvii. 18.

mind;

mind; and the whole current of impressive thought turns to edification. Though *wisdom* be *at one entrance quite shut out.* MED. XXIV.

" So much the rather thou, celestial Light,
" Shine inward, and the mind through all her powers
" Irradiate; there plant eyes, all mist from thence
" Purge and disperse, that *thou* may'st see and tell
" Of things invisible to mortal sight*."

That such a renovation of mind may be produced under so heavy an infirmity of body, by the influence of the Divine Spirit operating on the soul, no good Christian can doubt. That such things are possible, the examples of many blind men shew. Indeed circumstances most wonderful, and almost incredible, are related of the blind. The depth of thought they have evinced, the profound investigation of mathematical powers, the comprehension and enlargement even of such sciences as are thought to depend upon the eye and hand, approach, as it were, to a miracle. How quick the sense! How strong the memory! How active the fancy! How apprehensive

* Milton, Book iii. 51.

the

MED. XXIV.

the understanding! So long as sense, memory, fancy, and understanding remain, so long the comforts of an aged blind man may continue. And when such valuable properties of mind meet in an heart prepared by faith, these comforts will improve to happiness. If by the eye of reason we acquire a knowledge of intelligible things, and perceive such important truths as are attainable by man; and if, by the eye of faith we make yet further progress, and comprehend things supernatural and divine; the improvement of these eyes will fully compensate for the loss of bodily sight. What a vision will that be, when "we shall "see God as he is, and know *him* even as "we are known!" The eyes with which we now see will be darkness in comparison of him. We shall be reduced to the state of the blind, till God gives us strength, and bids us behold his glory, "the glory as of "the only-begotten of the Father, full of "grace and truth *."

I cannot dismiss the subject from my mind, till I have produced one instance

* John i. 14.

(and

(and many more might be given) of a good old man deprived of sight, as a confirmation of these observations. MED. XXIV.

"The writer has frequently been a witness of the family scene at Dr. Blacklock's (says his biographer) has seen the good man amidst the circle of his friends, eager to do him all the little offices of kindness, which he seemed so much to merit and to feel. In this society he seemed entirely to forget the privation of sight, and the melancholy which at other times it might produce. He entered with the chearful playfulness of a young man, into all the sprightly narrative, the sportful fancy, the humourous jest, that rose around him. It was a sight highly gratifying to philanthropy to see how much a mind endowed with knowledge, kindled by genius, and, above all, lighted up with innocence and piety, could overcome the weight of its own calamity, and enjoy the content, the happiness, and the gaiety of others*."

* Mackenzie's Life of Dr. B. Works, vol. vii. p. 68.

O my

MED. XXIV.

O my God! let me be thankful for my sight; preserve to me that inlet of happiness, though the light of the sun may be partially obscured through the infirmity of age. But far above all other considerations, let me possess the *light within*, the heavenly brightness of "God, who is light itself, and "in whom is no darkness at all*."

¶ I subjoin here, as a note, an extract from an interesting article "on Blindness," written by Dr. Blacklock himself, in the ENCYCLOPEDIA BRITANNICA.

"The sedentary life, to which, by privation of sight "the blind are destined, relaxes their frame, and subjects "them to all the disagreeable sensations which arise from "dejection of spirits. Hence the most feeble exertions "create lassitude and uneasiness. Hence the native tone "of the nervous system, which alone is compatible with "health and pleasure, destroyed by inactivity, exasperates "and embitters every disagreeable impression. Natural "evils, however, are always supportable; they not only arise "from blind and undesigning causes, but are either mild "in their attacks, or short in their duration; it is the "miseries which are inflicted by conscious and reflecting agents alone that can deserve the name of evils.— "Dependent on every creature and passive to every accident, can the world, the uncharitable world, be sur-

* 1 John i. 5.

"prised

MED. XXIV.

" prised to observe moments when the blind are at vari-
" ance with themselves, and every thing else around
" them?—This however is not always their character.
" Their behaviour is often highly expressive, not only
" of resignation, but even of chearfulness: and though
" they are often coldly and even inhumanly treated by
" men *, yet are they rarely, if ever, forsaken by heaven.
" The common Parent of nature, whose benignity is
" permanent as his existence, and boundless as his em
" pire, has neither left his afflicted creatures withou
" consolation or resource. Even from their loss, how-
" ever oppressive and irretrievable, they derive advan-
" tages; not indeed adequate to recompense, but suffi-
" cient to alleviate their misery. The attention of the
" soul, confined to those avenues of perception which
" she cannot command, is neither dissipated nor con-
" founded with the immense multiplicity or the rapid
" succession of surrounding objects. Hence her contem-
" plations are more uniformly fixed upon herself, and the
" revolutions of her own internal frame.—The joys of reli-
" gion are for ever adequate to the largest capacity of a
" finite and progressive intelligence; and as they are
" boundless in extent, so they are endless in duration.
" We have observed that the soul of a blind man is ex-
" tremely obnoxious to melancholy and dejection. Where
" therefore can he find a more copious, intimate, per-
" manent, and efficacious source of comfort, than in
" religion? Let this then be inculcated with the greatest
" care and assiduity. Let the whole force of the soul

* These expressions are undoubtedly too much heightened. As far as the writer's observation goes, the blind appear to be generally treated with respect, and in many instances with peculiar tenderness and compassion.

" be

MED. XXIV.

" be exerted in shewing him that it is *reasonable.* Let " all the noblest affections of the heart be employed in " recommending it as *amiable:* for we will venture to " assert, the votary of religion alone is the man—

" Quem, si fractus illabatur orbis,
" Impavidum ferient ruinæ."—

MEDI-

MEDITATION XXV.

The Old Man's Infirmities of Body.

Hear him, ye deaf, and all ye blind behold!—
He from thick films shall purge the visual ray,
And on the sightless eye-ball pour the day;
'Tis he th' obstructed paths of sound shall clear,
And bid new music charm th' unfolding ear;
The dumb shall sing, the lame his crutch forego,
And leap exulting like the bounding roe.
No sigh, no murmur the wide world shall hear,
From ev'ry face, he wipes off every tear.

POPE'S MESSIAH.

MED. XXV.

WERE it not for the reviving reflection afforded by the good spirit of God, how often should we sink under the increasing evils of human life! "Blessed indeed, oh "Lord, is the man whose strength is in "thee; in whose heart are thy ways; who

MED. XXV.

" going through the vale of misery use it " for a well, and the pools are filled with " water." The living stream in the sultry wilderness is a sweet allusion to the refreshment of divine grace in our journey through the world: for, thus supported, they will " go from strength to strength, and unto the " God of Gods appeareth every one of them " in Sion *."

Happy feeling! as we descend from the elevation of mature age, and find every year adding one, if not more infirmities, to the catalogue of natural decay.

Our dim eye is commonly succeeded by a dull ear. It is a matter of frequent discussion which of these deprivations is most to be regretted. I do not hesitate to pronounce, the former, if it were necessary to decide a question, perhaps never of importance. Both undoubtedly are afflictive; but, like other miseries, each bears its own burthen, and each possesses its own consolations. " The hearing ear " and the seeing eye, the Lord hath made " even both of them †." The great value

* Ps. lxxxiv. 5, 6, 7. † Prov. xx. 12.

of

of each is principally perceived from its loss: but if the loss of these senses be succeeded by pious resignation, and the cultivation of new sources of pleasure and instruction, we may conclude that "God is "good to all, and that his mercy is over all "his works." MED. XXV.

The ear is the entrance of knowledge: the ear is the entrance of faith. "Faith "cometh by hearing, and hearing by the "word of God *. But the avenue of the ear is shut up. Is all knowledge then abortive? Is all faith denied? By no means. The loss of this faculty is greatly compensated by the use of another. The blind man grows quicker of apprehension by the loss of sight. The deaf man watches with his eye. The divine gift of *letters* becomes more peculiarly to the deaf, a treasury of information. He travels through all the regions of science; through his native, and through foreign lands. He possesses the advantage of selection, and needs not be tempted to associate with the wicked and seducer. His book lies open before him—

* Rom. x. 17.

MED. XXV.

the book of purity and knowledge—the book of God—the source of truth and fountain of divine life. "He that can have "no ear for man, becomes all ear to "God." What does not the deaf man gain by having no communication with the world? No man indeed will desire deafness, because deafness is a bodily defect greatly to be deplored, attended with much inconvenience in our intercourse with man. But it is not without its benefit. We are not annoyed with much obtrusive or offensive conversation. We lose indeed many personable, agreeable communications; but the language of the frivolous, the words of the impure, and the argument of the infidel, never reach our ears. Our attention too is directed to *one point*. We imbibe ideas which remain with us, as they were imbibed without distraction. We are not interrupted in thought, but possess the same advantages with the blind, in meditation.

Deafness then is an old man's infirmity, but it is often an old man's blessing. If he possesses sufficient energy of mind, not to express his feelings with an over-

anxious

anxious curiosity, his deafness will not injure himself, nor be any inconvenience to his friends. There is a virtue in managing an infirmity well. Let him consider it as an infliction of heaven, which is always sent for some useful and beneficial purpose, and placid resignation will be the best proof of his religious obedience. MED. XXV.

"Ever since our ear was lent to the "serpent in Paradise," says Bishop Hall, "it has been *spiritually* deaf." With the quickest ears we must perceive this truth; for, in the apprehension of divine knowledge, and in the communication of spiritual graces, we "shut our ears to the "voice of the charmer charm he never so "wisely *." Let our natural deafness then operate towards our spiritual cure. Our external hearing is gone: let our internal hearing be improved. The suggestions of God's holy spirit never can be lost. That speaks to us in whispers, but it is heard in our inmost soul. Too many hear the voice of man, who never hear the voice of God. Hear *ye* the voice of God; whoever will,

* Ps. lviii. 5.

hear

MED. XXV.

hear the voice of man. "For as many as "are led by the spirit of God, they are the "sons of God; and the spirit of God "beareth witness with our spirit that we are "the sons of God *."

Let not our deafness then entirely frustrate our utility. "We hear for ourselves "but we speak [and write] for others." What forbids us to impart instruction? The same Saviour who openeth the ears, unties the tongue. He maketh the deaf to hear and the dumb to speak. May we so hear as to understand, to understand *thoroughly*, the words of everlasting life! and may we so speak as to *confess the faith of Christ crucified*, and bear continual witness to the ways of his salvation!

But bodily infirmity still pursues old age. Like Jacob, *we lean on the top of our staff*. Our limbs refuse their office. What then? Shall we express peevishness and discontent at the inevitable lot of protracted life? There is a moral warning in every new infirmity. If we are neither blind nor deaf, we may be *lame*. New symptoms should

* Rom. viii. 14. 16.

produce

produce new resolutions. Our next step may be into the grave. Learn, not to start at the unexpected sight. Try yourselves by appropriate contemplation. Accustom your hearts to think, what they must one day feel. If it be good to be afflicted; surely it is better to triumph over affliction. The effects of *lameness*, or insecure footsteps, are mere personal inconveniencies. They affect not the *real* Christian. Be strong in the spirit. Establish your hearts by faith. The stability which you should now seek, is the stability of the mind. A *good* King of Israel in his latter days, departing from this principle, became a temporal sufferer for his offence. "Asa, in the "thirty-ninth year of his reign, was dis-"eased in his feet, until his disease was "exceeding great, yet in his disease he "sought not to the Lord, but to the physi-"cians*." Temporal relief may safely be desired, but it must be sought in piety. "Honour the physician†." but honour God more. Be thankful for the means, but bless the giver. MED. XXV.

Bodily infirmity yet presses further. The

* 2 Chron. xvi. 12. † Ecclus xxviii. 1.

nerve-

MED. XXV.

nerveless arm becomes shattered by paralytic affection. Even the stout and the healthy in a moment suffer this change. But let not change of principle aggravate a disorder sufficiently mournful. In many cases the mind itself is shook: the train of thinking altered; and irritability and uneasiness are its inseparable companions. In these distresses, the patient sufferer, as far as his mental powers extend, must implicitly acquiesce, as well as his not less patient attendant. The trial indeed is great; for even extreme old age may feel it. But where one particle of mind remains, cherish it as a grain of gold. The breathings of God's spirit may again revive it.—"And he "said unto me, Can these bones live? And "I answered, O Lord God, thou knowest. "And he said unto me, Thus saith the Lord "God unto these bones; Behold I will cause "breath to enter into you, and ye shall live*."

The infliction of diseases is a lesson for every age of man, but those only require our present notice, which are connected with our declining years.

* Ez. xxxvii. 3, 5.

The

MED. XXV.

The chronic pain, which makes early inroads on the human constitution, often protracts its remembrance to a late period of life. It is sometimes welcomed (doubtless for consolation's sake) as the *friendly earnest of fourscore*. We are glad to deceive ourselves, or our friends, by promising old age as a blessing. God grant that it may be a real blessing to its possessor!—but that will not be acquired by deception. Consider life as it exists. Improve it, if you can; but dissemble not its comforts. All pain is the punishment of sin, or the trial of our Christian faith. This is the touchstone of age. Our Redeemer is as strong for us at fourscore, as at forty. Though our sensations may be duller, our confidence should be stronger, "being such an one as Paul, the "aged, and now also a prisoner—a *con-* "*firmed servant*—of Jesus Christ*."

But yet there are circumstances incident to old age which may not perhaps be called natural disease, and yet are to be distinguished as bodily infirmity; of these I may particularly remark *restlessness of person* and

* Philemon, 9.

want

MED. XXV.

want of repose. Both may arise from the unsteadiness of the nervous system, where they are not occasioned by a moral unhappiness of mind. In the former case, medicine may relieve, assisted by reflection; in the latter, nothing can give composure short of a quiet conscience. "Come unto me," says our blessed Lord, "and *I will give you rest.*" *Want of repose* is rather a deprivation than a pain; and yet it is often a severe affliction to an aged person. "He who "commanded an hundred and twenty-seven "provinces, could not command rest; *on* "*that night his sleep departed from him* *." The case of the King of Babylon was yet more distressing, and the expression more emphatic. "He dreamed dreams where- "with his spirit was troubled, and his sleep "*broke* from him †." *Life's sweet restorer, balmy sleep!* How dost thou shun the pillow, not merely of the miserable, but of man exhausted by years and bowed down by infirmity! The loss of rest, without the addition of disease, will produce weakness of body, and unhappiness of mind. But listen, thou

* Esth. vi. 1. † Dan. ii. 1.

good

good old man, listen to that heavenly voice which whispers to thee on thy bed: use the dark and solemn season of the night in contemplation of spiritual joys: commune with thine own soul: call around thee celestial inhabitants, and cast thy mind's eye on *him who is invisible.* "One glimpse of that sight "is worth more than all the sleep thine eyes "are capable of. Resign thyself into his "hands, and be at his disposal. What is "that sweet acquiescence but the rest of the "soul? Which, if thou findest in thyself, "thou mayest quietly resign the want of bo-"dily repose."

MED. XXV.

How may every human infirmity be softened by meditating on it in a religious light! The blind, the deaf, the lame, the maimed, cast themselves at Jesu's feet, and he healed them all. The same miracles he still performs on the spiritually diseased. Heal thy *mind:* and the infirmities of thy body will wonderfully decrease. Here the power of religion on the soul will be visible indeed. The shattered frame, the ruin of mortality, will be restored with fresh architectural beauties. The touch of divine love will make it spring up in a renewed life. Redeemed from

MED. XXV.

sin, and conscious of heavenly grace, the film will fall from the *blind man's* eyes, the *deaf* ear will joyfully receive the word of truth, the *lame* will stand firm in faith and godliness, the *paralytic* arm will be stretched out in grateful thanks to the God of heaven; every *chronical* disease will lose half its irritating power; he that turns restless on his bed, and *whose eyes prevent the night watches*, will be no longer a stranger to *him* who *giveth his beloved sleep.* In short, a group of happy lazars will be assembled around the throne of the Almighty, *redeemed*, *sanctified*, and *saved;* feeling no doubt the infirmity of the flesh, but not being conquered by it; sensible indeed of many fears, of many troubles, of much anguish and anxiety, yet triumphing over all by their strength in the Lord and in the power of his might. "Old "things are passed away, behold all things "are become new *." Debility of body is no longer an apology for an indulgence in vicious habits, nor relaxation of mind for weakness of faith. The bright ray of heavenly light has cleared away the cloud, and the old

* 2 Cor. v. 17.

man,

man, "*rejoicing in hope, patient in tribula-* MED.
"*tion, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord**," XXV.
completes the remnant of his years in the happy consciousness of *health, vigour,* and *salvation.*

That I may have meditated on the old man's bodily infirmities with some effect, teach me, blessed Lord! to bear my own. It is easy to bear another man's calamities: let me transfer that easiness to my own burthen, let me seize the cross, and carry it after Christ. Here may I try my strength, and here may I be triumphant!

* Rom. xii. 11, 12.

MEDI-

MEDITATION XXVI.

On a Vigorous and an Healthy Old Age.

So may'st thou live, till like ripe fruit, thou drop
Into thy mother's lap, or be with care
Gather'd, not harshly pluck'd, for death mature:
This is old age.—

MILTON.

MED. XXVI.

IN contemplating man in the late period of his life, I feel no inclination to dip my pen in its blackest ink, or to paint, in gloomy colours, the natural evils and inconveniencies of that state. Infirmities, both of mind and body, must then necessarily prevail. But the timid mind shrinks from reflections that end in misery; for though it may bear with fortitude the arrival of actual troubles, it seldom stands firm under the apprehension of them. What then

then is the part of wisdom? To remove that timidity by manly expectation, to dispel gloom and despair by the introduction of true light and knowledge, to banish the world, and—*to receive* CHRIST. MED. XXVI.

Far be it from me to endeavour to kindle a deceitful trust, a false tranquillity, in my own breast, or in that of others. With humility I adopt the language of St. Paul, "I say the truth in Christ, I lie not, my "conscience also bearing me witness in "the Holy Ghost*." By not painting old age in its darkest shadow is not for any flattering purpose, for the sake of keeping an object out of sight that may affright us, or of smoothing a rugged road that we must inevitably travel, but that we may not be deterred by fancied difficulties from attempting a conquest, which every aged man must make, or perish.

We have seen the effects of *mind* on the natural infirmities of age; let us now view them in the opposite state, and observe them as they appear in an old man of established health and vigour. *A sound*

* Rom. ix. 1.

mind

MED. XXVI.

mind in a sound body is an invaluable possession. But though we have found a degree of comfort to be compatible with many personal infirmities, nay, that the patient Christian even rejoices in the midst of suffering; yet we must not consider the reverse as invariably true, and imagine, that, however health may embellish age, happiness is its necessary and unavoidable consequence. Elevation of spirits indeed may reasonably be expected, but it is only in the true use of them that they can be productive of satisfaction. The cordial that intoxicates is very different from the cordial that revives; and therefore that we may truly estimate the value of the condition, we must recur to first principles.

What then is that which makes a vigorous and an healthy old age happy? The correct state of the mind. To accomplish this requires great vigour indeed. Let it be a daily study, and then it will be a daily comfort.—That it may be as effectual as human nature will permit, the foundation must be laid in youth. It must "grow with our years, and "strengthen with our strength." But God's mercy is without limits, and shews to men of every

every age that a great and an effectual door of reformation is always open. There were labourers, in the parable, of the eleventh hour, as well as labourers of the first. The danger of delay indeed is so imminent that few who wilfully continue in sinful practices, with a secret resolution to repent, at a future, but uncertain day, are ever allowed to reach it: or if they do reach repentance, or attain a spiritual mind, they do so generally with a weak and debilitated body; of course, they are not the objects of the present meditation.

But as health adds vigour to the animal spirits, the animal spirits, unfettered and unrestrained, overpower the better suggestions of the mind, and bring the aged man into danger. Hence arises a relapse into sin; a fatal falling off from grace. "O vine of Sib-"mah I will weep for thee—the spoiler is "fallen upon thy summer fruits, and upon "thy vintage *." It is truly melancholy to reflect that the blessing of health, surely one of the greatest of earthly comforts, should occasion such deplorable effects.—Because thy body remains unimpaired in strength, art

* Jer. xlviii. 32.

MED. XXVI.

thou therefore willing to hazard the welfare of thy soul? Because thou art able to rival younger men in vice, art thou no longer mindful that thou canst not rival them in years? Whatever may be the case with them, thy days are all numbered, and though, like the great lawgiver of the Jews, "thine eye "may not yet be dim, nor thy natural force "be *much* abated *," the time cannot be far distant when "thou also must die like other "men, and fall like one of the princes †."

I know not any greater mark of degeneracy in human nature than to see an old man, relying upon the strength of his constitution, and familiarly associating with young sinners: not only committing such things himself as would shame the conduct of an heathen, but "*having pleasure* in them that do them likewise ‡." Natural modesty revolts against such unnatural conduct. Religion shrinks: and the powers of the rational mind are justly offended. If it be disgusting to behold an old man act the character of a buffoon, what must it be to see him in the real character of

* Deut. xxxiv. 7. † Ps. lxxxii. 7.

‡ Rom. i. 32.

a sinner

a sinner glorying in his vices? The painter, who drew an exact representation of himself in a state of intoxication, was shocked at his own portrait, and reformed his life *. Happy would it be for many whose minds and bodies are debased by animal indulgences to look upon this picture and repent! MED. XXVI.

But in the healthiest old man the powers of nature will decay; at the same time that a sufficient portion of the animal spirits may remain to occasion one more wild and pernicious effervescence of the soul. From the failure of gratification in one point, the temptation breaks out in another. When the deed is silent, the word speaks. "The tongue "is a little member, and boasteth great "things. Behold how great a matter a little "fire kindleth! The tongue is a fire, a world "of iniquity: it is an unruly evil, full of "deadly poison †." Never are we so much inclined to acquiesce in this description, as when we hear an old person using language unbecoming his venerable years. We may

* It was so reported of Fuller, whose portrait, thus described, was lately in the picture gallery at Oxford.

† Jas. iii. 5, 6, 8.

MED. XXVI.

then truly say with the Prophet, "Gray "hairs are here and there upon him, yet he "knoweth it not *." What forms no apology for youth, will become a considerable aggravation in age. "The words of the pure "are pleasant words †."—"Let no corrupt "communication proceed out of your mouth," ye who are sanctified by age, and ought to be so by holiness!—"neither filthiness, nor "foolish talking, nor jesting which are not "convenient: for this ye know that no un-"clean person *(unclean in words as well as "actions)* hath, or *can have*, any inheritance "in the kingdom of Christ, and of God ‡".

Were I to indulge a meditation which had only temporal ends in view, I might consider religion as the natural cause of health; and, of course, that road, which leads more surely, than any other, to a strong and an healthy old age. But this, however valuable, is only a secondary motive. The healthy state of the body, is subservient to the healthy state of the soul. No man, on a true principle, becomes religious because he would be healthy; but many men are healthy because

* Hos. vii. 9. † Prov. xv. 26. ‡ Eph. iv. 29. v. 4, 5.

they

they have been religious. St. Paul considers sickness as a punishment of sin *, as well as the trial of a good man's faith. There is no impropriety then in looking upon health as an encouragement of virtue, and gratefully receiving it as a heavenly blessing. MED. XXVI.

Religion predisposes the mind to the conquest of the passions; and the conquest of the malignant passions is decidedly a cause of health. The observation indeed must be made with some latitude; for natural constitution will have great influence both in health and sickness. No care, no pains either of mind or body will restore, in many cases, the genial balm of health; and in many others, vices, early indulged and late dismissed, make no impression on the iron habit of an inveterate offender. All we can say is this. Almighty God, for the various purposes of his particular providence, has allotted different stations of life, and different habits and constitutions of body, to the several individuals that compose the world. We are here creatures of probation, whether we consider ourselves as sufferers, or as cherishers

* 1 Cor. xi. 30.

of

MED. XXVI.

of those that suffer. In both cases, we are called upon to fulfil a duty. Some of us, therefore, are tried by sickness; some, by health. The states of both are for this reason attended with danger—but to both, he says, "Be thou faithful *unto death**." Arrive at the end by the means which your Maker has provided. *His grace is sufficient for you:* and if you reach the haven, whatever be the mode of your conveyance, lay hold upon the prize and be thankful.

I will suppose religion to be accepted on the purest motives, and the end of the Christian's life to be constantly in the Christian's view. Let us then examine the question as connected with an healthful old age. All other things equal, the advantage is greatly on the side of virtue. It not only prevents that which would produce premature debility, but it promotes those means which are favourable to protracted vigour. It rejects habits which engender poison: it receives sustenance which nourishes with the sweetest viands. It spurns those hurtful passions, which the wise man says are *rottenness to the*

* Rev. ii. 10.

bones,

bones, while it embraces with more than fraternal tenderness those heavenly graces, which the same inspired author informs us, shall be *health to thy navel and marrow to thy bones.* "My son! forget not my law, but let "let thine heart keep my commandments, "for *length of days*, and *long life* and *peace*, "shall they add to thee *."

Here then the great secret is discovered. A conscience void of offence; an heart emptied of sin through the righteousness of Christ; an humble mind; a sanctified spirit—these are the grand restoratives of the sons of men. This is that joy which no man taketh from us; for this is that "kingdom of heaven which is "righteousness, and peace, and joy in the "Holy Ghost †."

Can we doubt then the effect of this holy principle, as we descend from advanced age to the borders of the grave? "A merry "heart," or rather an heart thus gladdened, "doeth good like a medicine ‡."—"A merry "heart maketh a cheerful countenance §."—Certainly no man ought to be so uniformly

* Prov. iii. 2. † Rom. xiv. 17.

‡ Prov. xvii. 22. § Ib. xv. 13.

chearful,

MED. XXVI.

chearful, so continually placid, or feel greater exultation of mind, than he who submits with implicit obedience to the divine will, who takes Christ for his master, and the Holy Spirit for his guide and comforter. The strongest faith indeed will not remove pain, or from the most aged avert the hand of death. But though it cannot wholly prevent our infirmities, it will considerably alleviate their pressure; and though it will not free us from our mortal state, it will bestow upon us a glorious immortality. "Then shall thy "light break forth as the morning, and thine "*health* shall spring forth speedily; and thy "righteousness shall go before thee, and the "glory of the Lord (the bright effulgence of "his presence) shall be thy reward *."

Above all other gifts, give me, blessed Lord! an *healthy* soul: and then, if it do not reflect back vigour on my decaying limbs, it will help me forward in my spiritual journey. "Behold," says the Almighty, "I "will bring it health and cure, and I will "cure them, and will reveal unto them abun-"dance of peace and truth †."

* Is. lviii. 8. † Jer. xxxiii. 6.

MEDITATION XXVII.

The Old Man's Preservation of the Intellectual Faculties.

Subdued at length beneath laborious life,
With passion struggling, and by ease deprest,
In peaceful age, that ends the various strife,
The harassed virtues gladly sink to rest.

Yet not in flow'ry indolence reclined
They waste th' important gift of sober hours,
To every state has heaven its task assigned,
To every task assigned its needful powers.

Amidst the waste of years, preserve entire
The undecaying spirits nobler part,
The vivid spark of intellectual fire,
And all the gentler graces of the heart.

MRS. ELIZ. CARTER.

AMONGST the several blessings for which we have daily reason to be thankful to a kind and *particular* Providence, there is not one in MED. XXVII.

MED. XXVII.

in which our souls are more interested than in the preservation of our intellectual faculties. The loss of one animal sensation is generally compensated by another. If we are deprived of one personal gratification, the mind finds refuge in some other comforter. If the whole structure of the body be injured by inflictions either of a temporal or spiritual nature, the incorruptible mind still presses forward with fresh succours of intellectual strength, derived from a constant and never failing source of consolation. But what can recompense the loss of intellect? When that divine principle is disarranged or extinguished in man, all is blank and dreariness, all is shut up in misery and ruin. The delicate texture of the brain, and the nice distribution of those subtile organs which contribute to the use of reason, lie too deep for human investigation. The effect is visible, the cause is hidden; all cause indeed, except that creating and preserving cause which operates in universal nature. Cowper, as exquisitely felt, as finely said—

"Man is an harp, whose chords elude the sight
"Each yielding harmony disposed aright,

"The

"The screws reversed (a task, which if he please,
"God in a moment executes with ease)
"Ten thousand thousand strings at once go loose,
"Lost, till he tune them, all their power and use*."

The use of intellect being considered as a common blessing, like that of the elements, which are as essential to our existence in an animal, as that is in a spiritual state, we are apt to pass them equally by, as if equally insensible of their value; nor can any thing but the absolute fear of deprivation in either case, restore us to reasonable reflection. We act in opposition to that very principle which gives us life; and without which we cannot act at all. We breathe the grateful air, and—commit the foulest offences. Punishment overtakes us, and we are immersed in the vapour of a dungeon: and not till then are we brought to estimate truly the advantages of virtuous freedom, and to enjoy the incalculable comfort of the refreshing breeze. Such is the use, or rather misuse, of our faculties in the days of health and youth. Old age arrives with all its feeble exertions, and we lament the departure of sound and virtuous intellect.

* Retirement.

"All

MED. XXVII.

"All this," the undiscerning say, "is the "course of nature; the joys of autumn are "only *sickly joys;* neither the progress of "the sun, nor the progress of human life "can be retarded. The state of the oak in "its meridian, and in its declension must "necessarily differ."—This is true. But though the progress of time may not be retarded, nor the oak, even of a thousand years, be prevented from final decay, yet has divine Providence in its goodness given to the hand of man to meliorate what it cannot remove, and to preserve in useful vigour those faculties which would sooner perish from unmerited neglect.

I know not any consideration of more importance to the aged than this. Do they complain of the rapidity of time? Here they may add to their years. Do they regret the departure of enjoyments? Here they can arrest them in their course. By the true use of every remaining faculty, by watching the encroachment of indolence, by guarding against self-indulgence, by abstaining from seductive and pernicious aliments, by renouncing enervating pleasures, they may retain, if not the full flow of youth,

youth, the animating vigour of an healthful age.—"Bless the Lord!" may he then say, "O my soul; and all that is within me "bless his holy name: who redeemeth thy "life from destruction; who crowneth thee "with loving-kindness and tender mercies; "who satisfieth thy mouth with good things, "so that thy youth is renewed like the "eagle's*." MED. XXVII.

The first rational operation of intellect at our entrance into the world, is the adoration of God. The next is, or ought to be, the study of the avowed and authentic revelation of his will. To study God's will, and to work out our own salvation by the means which he has appointed, is a continual exercise of our rational faculties. It does not tend more to the welfare of our spiritual part, than to the health even of our animal frame. "Pleasant words"—and such are surely the words of eternal life—are as a honeycomb, "*sweet to the soul, and health* "*the bones*†."

I would not use so false an argument as to recommend, under any sanctions, tem-

* Ps. ciii. 1, 4, 5. † Prov. xvi. 24.

poral

MED. XXVII.

poral health merely as a *compensation* for the performance of religious duties. Valuable as a sound body is, and inestimable as are all the faculties of man, I would not wish to possess even these advantages, on such mercenary, such unbecoming, terms. Be our motives pure, whatever the event. What God bestows, receive: but receive it as of *grace*, and not of *debt*.

Yet, under the consideration of the moral government of the world, a due attention to health is certainly a duty of religion. We may argue thus. To retain our intellectual faculties as long as we are able, is to protract our thankfulness to God, and our usefulness to men. Whatever is injurious to our bodily health is injurious to our intellectual faculties. Vice is injurious to health; therefore vice is injurious to our intellectual faculties. Reason and religion agree in this conclusion; and whatever the sceptic may advance, or the profligate imagine, reason and religion, as they sprang together from the bosom of divine wisdom, will for ever remain united. *What God hath joined together, let no man put asunder.*

Our

MED. XXVII.

Our next inquiry is, what branch of religious duty is most beneficial to the preservation of our intellectual faculties? Need I say that, the warmth of devotion, above all others, will keep alive in the devout breast, a succession of pious feelings. These, operating on the *whole man*, will produce an heavenly mind, the true characteristic of a regenerate spirit. What do we mean by *righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost*, if we do not mean all that a pious old man feels, under the impression of true religion?

Apathy and dulness are two distresses of of the aged, which, unrepelled and unconquered, will make formidable inroads on the understanding. Sometimes indeed they are involuntary affections, and afford symptoms of a natural decay, which precedes but a little those melancholy hours, of which many complain, "I have no pleasure in "them *."" But may not these enemies, if not of an old man's peace, certainly of his comfort, and of the true enjoyment of himself, be successfully resisted? May not

* Eccl. xii. 1.

MED. XXVII.

the conviction of his religious state stimulate his endeavours to keep his faculties free from an impure mixture of mere earthly sensations? May not the near approach of his Saviour and his judge, rouse his slumbering apprehensions? and the recollection of that love, that pure delight so often kindled on the view of his redemption, burn bright to his latest hour, and give an animation even to his expiring lips?

Let the old man beware of losing this anchor of hope. Good thoughts and good desires are too apt to slip from us; particularly at that age, when activity of imagination is past, and the decaying body affords at least a specious pretence for giving way to greater indolence of mind than even that advanced period of life allows.

But religion is always young; as flourishin the last breath of life, as when it was first touched at the creation by the finger of the Almighty: for

—"Thou shalt flourish in immortal youth
"Unhurt amidst the war of elements
"The wrecks of matter and the crush of worlds*."

* Addison's Cato.

Youth

MED. XXVII.

Youth is the reign of fancy. At that season ideas flow spontaneously, and the exercise of the intellectual faculties is made with less exertion; but at a later period of life the scene is changed. Men of maturer years, intent on the passing business of life, neglect the use of intellect. "Ideas in the "mind quickly fade, and often vanish quite "out of the understanding, leaving no more "footsteps, or remaining characters of them-"selves," as a celebrated philosopher poetically expresses it, "than shadows do flying "over fields of corn; and the mind is as "void of them as if they had never been "there *." But are they therefore never to be recovered? Though the impression be obscured, it is not lost. The faculty of recollection will bring them again before us, and repetition and retention will preserve them to us. Our devotional exercises will operate as a technical memory, and we shall retain, even to hoar hairs, those traces of intellect which are most valuable. Whatever fades from the mind, the love of God will *never fade*. However debility may

* Locke on Human Underst. b. ii. c. x.

MED. XXVII.

oppress the body, while one *vivid spark of intellectual fire* continues to illuminate the soul, the religious principle will be kept vigorously alive, and will communicate its brightness to all the pure Christian graces of the heart.

It is the duty of an old man, therefore, to keep his senses open; open to all the finer feelings of the mind; open to virtuous affection under every shape:—to be interested in his friends and relatives; not to shut his eyes or his heart against the unadulterated playfulness of infancy, or the amiable activity of youth. The advantage indeed will be mutual; and the attention of the venerable parent will be happily repaid by the reflected vivacity of the child. But above all, he must keep his senses open towards the God of his salvation. *Awake to righteousness*, valuable friend!—"Awake, "thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, "and Christ shall give thee light†."

Let me awake from the torpor of reiterated sinful life, and keep every faculty alive in the warm feeling of religious faith.

* Ephes. v. 14.

"What

"What meanest thou, O sleeper? Arise, MED. XXVII.
"call upon thy God *?"—"In the even-
"ing, and the morning, and at noon-day
"will I pray, and that instantly—earnestly
"and fervently—and He shall hear my
"voice †."

* Jonah i. 6. † Ps. lv. 17.

MEDITATION XXVIII.

The Old Man's Preservation of the Intellectual Faculties.

———Who would lose,
Though full of pain, this intellectual being,
Those thoughts that wander through eternity,
To perish rather, swallowed up and lost
In the wide womb of uncreated night,
Devoid of sense and motion?— MILTON.

MED. XXVIII.

THERE is an annihilation of mind, as well as a supposed annihilation of body. Both are abhorrent from that consciousness of an intellectual existence, implanted by the God of nature in the breast of man. There is no one who has felt the genial beams of a warm imagination, who would not wish to preserve it to his latest hour. Under any circumstance, at least, it must be his earnest desire to retain and cherish so many rays

rays of it, as are able to comfort and refresh his departing spirit. The decays of nature no man may resist; at the same time that it must be every man's inclination to lay his head *gently* on his mother's lap. But indolence of mind will never realize this most happy expectation. MED. XXVIII.

There is so much of mechanism in the constitution of man, our earthly part requires such continued touches, as it were, of our spiritual affections, that the least intermission of such an operation produces an intellectual torpor, and sends us to our graves in melancholy or misery. That this combination of soul and body should be properly attempered is the office of judgment; a judgment springing from an holy fount, regulated, directed, and applied by a solemn and devout meditation of the revealed will of God. Mere nature will hardly help us forward in so arduous a task. The natural passions are ungovernable. The imagination too is naturally wild, and difficult to be restrained. The intellectual faculties, excellent as they are in principle, are often defective in operation. External objects press upon them.

The

MED. XXVIII.

The thought is interrupted; the design is lost.

Were the soul a material substance, the old man might in vain bewail his situation, and weep over the fine conceptions of his mind in the days of pure intellect and vigour, now ready, as it might seem, to be totally "swallowed up, and lost in the "wide womb of uncreated night."—"As "is the earthy, he may reflect, such are "they that are earthy," but an unerring guide gives him a more chearful hope, and he proceeds, led by a celestial hand, "as is the heavenly such are they also that "are heavenly, and as we have borne the "image of the earthy, we shall also bear "the image of the heavenly *."—And what is the image of God in the soul of man, but that intellectual union which incorporates, if I may so say, the spiritual man with the spiritual nature of the Almighty? Here then is an object worthy of attainment; and to preserve those faculties which constitute this union, as clear and as long as the purposes of Divine Providence permit, is a duty which every aged man is called upon to perform.

* 1 Cor. xv. 48, 49.

But

But the old man says, "The powers of MED. XXVIII.
"nature fail; memory grows weak; ar-
"rangement of thought is difficult; ima-
"gination gradually and almost imper-
"ceptibly evaporates; and reason itself
"decays."—With a tear we receive his sorrowful reflection, and acquiesce in the general justness of his reply. But if he produces this apology to cover every future exertion of his mind, we cannot so far sooth his sorrows as to bid him dismiss all solicitude, even amidst the weakness and decrepitude of old age.—Hear the words of the Prophet, "Even to your old age I am
"he; and even to hoar hairs will I carry
"you: I have made and I will bear—even
"I will carry, and will deliver you *."—Time, then, which hath bereft you of many comforts, cannot wholly deprive you of this. The divine union, the spiritual intercourse will remain till, "*this corruptible* "*shall have put on incorruption, and this* "*mortal shall have put on immortality* †." If God requires this of you, God will support you to the end. He provides both the

* Is. lxxi. 4. † 1 Cor. xv. 53.

recom-

MED. XXVIII.

recompence, and the means. The recompence is his; but the application of the means is in your own power. But you say, "Your bodily frame refuses to perform its "office." True. You must submit to inevitable inflictions. But preserve the pure temper and disposition of your mind. That is an undecaying quality while God blesses you with reason. "Be renewed," says the Apostle, "in the spirit of your minds *."

Want of use will destroy every energy of the body: want of use will destroy every energy of the soul. Weakness of the animal powers will bring on weakness of the mental faculties; and thus may every indolent man be guilty of a *moral suicide*. Harsh as this language may appear, it will not be found too severe, if attributed to those for whom it is intended: and if it rouse from a state of unproductive indolence any aged person, who may imagine himself less called upon for exertion as the number of his years increase, I feel myself bold enough not to retract the observation. I am willing however to qualify the admonition by allowing an important and justi-

* Eph. iv. 23.

fying

fying difference between the real loss of sensible emotions, the extinction or deadness of the rational passions, and that supposed and premature debility which is merely the covering and apology of mental sloth. MED. XXVIII.

Let us apply this remark to the case of memory. "In so far as the decay of memory which old age brings along with it," says a moral philosopher, "is a necessary consequence of a physical change in the constitution, or a necessary consequence of a diminution of sensibility, it is the part of a wise man to submit chearfully to the lot of his nature. But it is not unreasonable to think, that something may be done by our own efforts to obviate the inconveniencies which commonly result from it."—"The few old men who continue in the active scenes of life to the last moment, it has often been remarked, complain, in general, much less of a want of recollection, than their contemporaries. This is undoubtedly owing to the effect which the pursuits of business must necessarily have, in keeping alive the *power of attention*. But it is probably owing to new habits of arrange-

MED. XXVIII.

" arrangement which the mind gradually " and insensibly forms from the experience " of its growing infirmities *."—

It is worthy of reflection, if the above observation be true, that the improvement of memory, and all the advantages to be derived from a continual use of the intellectual faculties, must not be *begun* in age. It is progressive in every period of life, till we attain a maturity and stabilily of understanding; but to make it valuable to the end, it requires superior vigilance, *new habits of arrangement*, as we approach the limit of our years.

No one of our faculties is more wonderful than that of memory. The storehouse of the mind contains indeed a sacred treasure; but its true value consists of its selection and its use. " Our minds," says Locke, " represent to us those tombs, " to which we are approaching; where " though the brass and marble remain, " yet the inscriptions are effaced by time, " and the imagery moulders away. *The* " *pictures drawn in our minds, are laid in*

* Stewart's Phil. of the Human Mind, 8vo. p. 361.

" *fading*

"*fading colours;* and if not sometimes re-
"freshed, vanish and disappear. In view-
"ing again," he says, "the *ideas* that are
"lodged *in the memory, the mind is often-*
"*times more than barely passive*, the ap-
"pearances of these dormant pictures, de-
"pending sometimes on the will. The
"mind very often sets itself to work in
"search of some hidden *idea*, and turns,
"as it were, the eye of the soul upon it*."
When we consider memory in this light, how serious will it be to those who, through carelessness and inattention, or who, through a wilful dismissal of all pious and improving thoughts, are wont to exclaim, "I have a "bad memory!"

The reflecting mind will perceive from this consideration, that there is a moral and religious reason for the cultivation of memory, from which no good Christian will think himself excused; and when time hath matured the practice of this piety, the old man will be fully recompensed by the gratification it will afford. A religious memory, at that period when this world closes, and

* Hum. Und. b. ii. c. x.

the

MED. XXVIII.

the next opens its prospects, will bear its own value with it. We may be allowed to forget much that hath incumbered life, if we remember, and cherish *thoughts that wander through eternity*.

The intellectual faculties which are capable of a progressive improvement, we have reason to believe, will be rather increased, than diminished, in a state of immortality. What true dignity does this bestow upon the soul of man! What glory beams upon the hoary head of him who, in the latest moment of life, looks still further for the accomplishment of his great designs!—With the Gospel in his hand he hath passed through life: with the Gospel in his *heart*, he enters gladly into the joy of his Lord.—O Lord! protect thy aged servant by thy favour from all the powers of darkness; preserve his mind free and unclouded, purified by thy grace and fit for his removal.—Give me, O Saviour! a firm footing in thy love, entire confidence in thy merits, and a grateful hope of thy salvation! Look graciously upon my failings, and forgive my negligences and offences. Support me by a renewal of thy Holy Spirit under the oppressions

pressions and infirmities of declining years, and when I shall walk through the valley of the shadow of death remove from me the fear of evil. Be thou always with me, and let thy rod and thy staff, thy comfort and holy consolation, remain with me for ever! *Amen, Amen!*

MED. XXVIII.

MEDI-

MEDITATION XXIX.

The Old Man's Preservation of the Intellectual Faculties.

Born capable indeed of heavenly truth,
But down to latest age from earlist youth,
Their mind a wilderness for want of care,
The plough of wisdom never ent'ring there.

COWPER.

MED. XXIX.

THAT a being formed for eternity should be continually pressing forward to a state of expected happiness, and endeavouring to render all the faculties of his soul more worthy of the change, is consistent with those rational principles implanted in man's nature by his all-wise and all-powerful Creator. That such a being, thus *born capable of heavenly truth*, should neglect these inestimable advantages, debase his reason, degrade his feelings, welcome his corruptions, and

and delight in iniquity, is repugnant to every moral, every religious, and even every natural impression. If he does not believe himself accountable for his actions, he offends against society; if he has no faith in the revealed will of God, and in the motives of reconciliation which are offered through the Redeemer of the world, he offends against religion; and if, rejecting both, he follows only what seems right in his own eyes, and opposes the dictates of his conscience, his very nature will revolt against him, and leave him a prey to the most insatiable enemies. MED. XXIX.

It is true that, by nature man is capable of the most enormous acts of wickedness; but it is equally true that, this delinquency is relieved, and in the end wholly removed through the grace of God, which is never wanting to the penitent. If we imagine life to have begun under one impression, we may hope and trust that it may be ended under another. But indolence of mind, or the vacuity of fruitful thought will never effect so beneficial a purpose. The moral principle, like bodily powers, stagnates for want of use. Religion itself is active. Its motives

MED. XXIX.

motives are vital; giving life and energy to its whole being. If these springs give way when time is young, what must we expect in old age when the faculties actually decline? The *plough-share of wisdom* therefore requires a continual direction. It must never cease from the furrow. The cessation of culture marks the growth of every pernicious weed, and an undiscerning negligence will prevent even the possibility of recovery. Who, that possesses a mind but a little sensible of its value, could be satisfied that it should remain a barren and a desolate wilderness? Who, that feels even the slightest compunctions of conscience, that has even a remote conception of the sacred laws of God, or beholds, for he cannot but behold, the fluctuation of time, *who* can risk so great a stake on so slender a foundation?

It is plain then that he who provides not for the extension of his natural and moral faculties is aiding and abetting in their extinction. How serious an offence is this! May not the Almighty judge exclaim, as he once did by the mouth of an holy Prophet, "I gave them my statutes, and shewed

"them

" them my judgments, which if a man do " he shall even live in them *."—I gave them living principles of action; I bestowed upon them powers of understanding; they possessed the purest reason, the warmest imagination;—and lo! old age is come upon them and all are fled!—How melancholy! If any thing can add energy to endeavours, surely this reflection must; particularly when we consider that that which most men naturally desire is chiefly to be acquired by a diligent attention to this duty, namely, the prolongation and enjoyment of life. For what is life without enjoyment? and what pure enjoyment can there be, independent of those improving principles which keep alive the utility of our existence. MED. XXIX.

The vacant mind must be left wholly to itself in the late periods of human life. The sun has gone too far down to revive, or even to cherish its decaying powers. We may indeed lament the state to which such old age has fallen, but to recall its vivifying warmth is then impossible. The effect of many years of indolence has at

* Ez. xx. 11.

MED. XXIX.

last arrived; and truly to be pitied is that aged man whose *happiness*, I use the word with diffidence, consists in torpid indifference and want of feeling.

But he who hath been wise enough in the progress of his life to have the end of it always in his view, will find himself, as life declines, in a very different situation. A *defect* of his faculties will not surprize him unawares. When he perceives the first encroachment, he arrests it on its road, and feels himself sufficiently a master of defence to manage ingeniously what he is no longer able to resist. "One old man," says an acute writer, "I have myself had the "good fortune to know, who after a long, "an active, and an honourable life, having "begun to feel some of the usual effects "of advanced years, has been able to find "out resources in his own sagacity against "most of the inconveniencies with which "they are commonly attended; and who, "by watching his gradual decline, with the "cool eye of an indifferent observer, and "employing his ingenuity to retard its pro-"gress, has converted even the infirmities

"of

"of age into a source of philosophical "amusement*." MED. XXIX.

It is no uncommon sight, to observe, in an old man thus amiably employed, an active recurrence of the objects of his early studies; and a vivid recollection of those facts and reflections which tended to improve the information of his former days. Here the wisdom of Divine Providence most conspicuously appears. The order of nature is not reversed, and yet the old man once more enjoys the comforts of his youth. Present objects, and recent circumstances, perhaps, slip from his mind. His habits of attention are more relaxed, and his personal, and unavoidable inconveniencies, draw him more towards himself. The repetition of the same scene takes away the attraction of novelty, and the twice told tale palls upon his ear. But with all this, he is too well instructed in the school of wisdom to permit disgust to usurp a dangerous dominion in his breast. It is true, recent facts have gone from him. This is an infirmity of nature, which,

* Stewart's Phil. of the Human Mind, 8vo. p. 361.

MED. XXIX.

perhaps, at that period, no habit of attention can correct. He permits them therefore to glide gently along on the stream of time. But he recalls those for his immediate gratification which have long reposed in the store-house of his memory. It is his favourite occupation to rest on the recollection of youthful scenes and juvenile delights. It is his comfort to reflect how long, and how often, the Lord hath been gracious unto him. He who, *while he was yet young*, like Josiah, *sought after the God of his father* *, in his old age will have *his youth renewed like the eagles* †.

A good old man being asked, what prescription he would recommend for attaining an old age as healthful and happy as his own?—"My prescription," said he, "is simple: short, but chearful meals, "music, and *a good conscience*." We shall believe that this worthy character followed his own prescription when we are told that, "he was one of those fortunate "praisers of times past, who are perfectly "alive to the enjoyment of the present;

* 2 Chron. xxxiv. 3. † Psalm ciii. 5.

"whose

" whose partial recollection of former times " and former joys, results from the same " warm and active temperament, that still " preserves cordiality for present friends, " and spirit for present amusements. He " retained this ardour and activity to the " close of life; and at fourscore was as " ready as ever to join in the conversation, " and to participate the mirth of his young " friends and relations *."

MED. XXIX.

If our early thoughts are to be our latest pleasures, what a fund of contemplation is opened to our minds! Who would wish to call up the *ghosts of our departed hours*, unless we could present them to our mind's eye in the delightful robes of purest white? —Think on this, ye young! if the lengthened life be your desire. Think on this, ye strong! while the bold grasp indicates your manly years. Oh! think how vainly ye may wish to recal your present fleeting time, how vainly ye may struggle against the fading evening of life with shattered limbs and debilitated understanding!

* Mackenzie's Memoirs of Tylter. Works, vol. vii. p. 68.

But

MED. XXIX.

But what real satisfaction arises in that aged mind which is able to meet the sorrows of protracted years with the reviving recollection of youthful comforts. Religion, which then shone bright, shines brighter still; and the piercing beams of an eternal day dart through the chinks and crevices of time. The early habits of the association of virtuous and holy ideas are the real blessings of a pious man in the decline of life. Out of his heart no thoughts will proceed but those which fill his soul with gladness; and as that is the store-house of divine grace, he may happily anticipate the glories of immortality.

How good is God to allow such an alleviation to our decaying faculties! How good is God to prompt the faultering tongue, and to strengthen the drooping heart! *Faint, yet pursuing* *, was descriptive of Gideon. *Faint, yet pursuing*, affords a true delineation of piety in its closing scene. But though the faculties decay, a gleam of pure piety may still remain; in-

* Judges viii. 4.

clination

clination may be still vigorous; and faith and hope retain their wonted strength. The last effort is as true to its purpose as the first; and in this, old age differs only from youth, that it hears with more complacency the assurance of victory than the trumpet which sounded to the battle.—"Comfort "ye, comfort ye, my people, saith your "God. Speak ye comfortably to Jeru- "salem, and cry unto her, that her warfare "is accomplished, that her iniquity is par- "doned *".

MED. XXIX.

How shall I feel when it is announced that *my warfare is accomplished!* God grant that it may be succeeded with—*thine iniquity is pardoned!* so shall I find fresh vigour in my mouldering limbs, be sensible of renovated strength, and, through the fostering spirit of the Almighty, take wing for eternity!

NOTE.

The author of Memoirs of the Life of Lord Kaimes makes the following observation on Dr. Reid's metaphysical Letters to his Lordship, written within a very few years of his death.—"Among other considerations

* Is. xl. 2.

"they

MED. XXIX.

" they naturally suggest is this, which I cannot but " regard as a phenomenon fertile both of pleasing and " of melancholy reflection, that in the last stage of " our existence, it is a favourite occupation of the " mind, not only to recal the remembrance of the " scenes and actions of our youth, but to retrace those " ideas, and cherish those speculations which first en- " gaged our reasoning powers." An eminent philosopher (he adds in a note) in treating of the influence of prevailing habits of association in our usual train of thinking, assimilates this favourite employment of the mind in old age, of recalling the scenes and occupations of youth, to the state of the mind in dreaming. Things present to the senses are not perceived, and the memory rests with a stronger attention on those objects and actions which engaged us while the facility of association was greater than it is found to be in our maturer years. (Elements on the Philosophy of the Human Mind by Professor Stewart, ch. v. sect. 5.) This account of the phenomenon is probably in a great measure true; and it must be allowed to be in so far a source of melancholy reflection, that it presumes a decay of some of the mental powers: but I am persuaded that the pleasure we take in old age, in reviewing the scenes and occupations of infancy and youth is chiefly to be referred to another source; to that admirable faculty of our nature by which in defect of present amusements, we can retrace by the aid of memory and imagination, the scenes and actions which furnished our past enjoyments, and *feed* upon that mental picture with a relish very little inferior to that which we formerly felt from the reality;

ality;—a most beautiful part of the human economy, and which we cannot contemplate without a fervent emotion of gratitude to that POWER who *so* framed us. Lord Woodhouselee's Memoirs of Lord Kaimes, vol. i. p. 188.

MEDITATION XXX.

On the bad Habits and Vices of Old Age.

For better purposes to favour'd man
Is length of days, tremendous blessing! given;
To regulate our life's disorder'd plan,
And purify the blemish'd soul for heaven.

MRS. ELIZ. CARTER.

MED. XXX.

IN a long journey it is reasonable to expect that the impediments we may have met with, if not removed by the length of the way, will at least become less troublesome and offensive from the state of mind which circumstances will supply. It is a barren head which experience will not teach, and it is a feeble heart that will not be supported by true fortitude. But alas! in the journey of life how many carry their burthens with them. Instead of casting away at every

every stage some turbulent passion, some oppressive habit, they retain all their original possessions, with an accumulated measure of imaginary wants. And happy would it be if this were all. But pernicious vices, as well as pernicious habits, cling close to them; nay, cling closer to them as they approach the end of their course. How may this be accounted for? The infirmity of human nature travels the same road with them; and if it continue uncorrected by God's grace, it will be as unruly as the latter end of life, as it was at the beginning. Is not life then a *tremendous blessing?*—for unless the uses of life are duly considered, and improved, through the blessings of redeeming love, the *blemished soul* can never look for heaven. MED. XXX.

What impression of mind can be more melancholy and distressing on the bed of death, than the wish that all, or almost all, that we have said or done, should be erased from the record of the Almighty! Doubtless all our best actions, and our best words, have in them the nature of sin, if they "spring not of faith in Jesus "Christ," as our articles observe *. They

* Art. XIII.

do

MED. XXX.

do not even deserve the name of *good*, if they are without motive, and without end. A *good* disposition is only good, when it has this foundation: for without the pure sanctification of the spirit, it misleads, and deceives, both ourselves and others.

When age comes upon us, the observation is striking. The old man is called upon to say, and to do, many things, which are passed easily over in the prime of life. His judgment is expected to have been improved by experience. His opinions should have in them *the taste of time*, and he ought to shew by the general tenour of his behaviour, what peculiar advantages he has gained by being long in life. Wisdom is attributed to an old man by his juniors. And with much propriety; for his opportunities of observation have been great. "Wisdom is that "which makes men judge what are the best "ends, and what the best means to attain "them, and gives a man advantage of "counsel and direction*." The old man therefore is called upon to exercise the gift of wisdom, and his rule of judging is laid

* Sir William Temple.

clear

clear before him. What the unreflecting world calls wisdom he must reject; for then neither the *best ends* nor the *best means* will present themselves before him. But the "wisdom which cometh from above" implies the knowledge of divine, as well as of human things, and the study of the one, is the criterion by which to judge of the other. "The wisdom which cometh from above is "pure *;" let the aged seek purity, and men and angels will justly esteem them *wise*. MED. XXX.

Even the propensities of old age, however perverted, have in them something peculiar to that state, something that is productive of good, if properly applied; if improperly applied, they constitute bad habits, which are detrimental to their own happiness, and destructive of the comforts of society. Let us consider particulars.

Loquacity is a bad habit of advanced life, if not judiciously applied. Divine Providence has given a multitude of words to old men that they may communicate wisdom. But when they do not communicate wisdom, silence is more decorous. To en-

* James iii. 17.

gross

MED. XXX.

gross the whole of conversation without some good end in view, is to be unjust to our companions, to exhaust ourselves, and to drive from our presence many, who if not benefited by us, might contribute considerably to our knowledge and improvement. "When shall vain words have an "end?"—"How long will ye break me in "pieces with words*?"—may be well applied to the inconsiderate aged talker. "In "the multitude of words, there wanteth "not sin†." He that talketh much, should talk well, and then *loquacity* will be a blessing.

Another bad habit of old age is the indulgence of *a fretful and querulous disposition*. *Fretfulness* is an inferior species of anger; it partakes of its irritability without its violence. There is a disappointed pride in fretfulness, which shews that the bitterness of that malignant passion is unsubdued. I would speak with all tenderness of those sensations which spring from bodily infirmity, but a *systematic* fretfulness should meet with no indulgence.—The *querulous*

* Job. xvi. 3. xix. 2. † Prov. x. 19.

habit

habit is not less an enemy of private happiness than the fretful. It feeds upon itself, and by heaping up grievances, real or imaginary, becomes the cause of its own uneasiness. In the list of the ungodly, Jude reckons "murmurers and complainers *;" and if their rank in society be estimated upon true prineiples, they would neither be placed among the pleasant and agreeable, nor yet the valuable and instructive. MED. XXX.

With the fretful and the querulous, we must arrange the man of *repulsive manners*, as well as him who is *difficult to please*. For how can these qualities be consistent with Christian benevolence?—"Be pitiful: "be *courteous* †."—"Walk in love, as Christ "also hath loved us ‡."—"As touching "brotherly love, ye need not that I write "unto you; for ye yourselves are taught "of God to love one another §."—"Com- "fort yourselves *together*, and edify one "another ‖," and "esteem them very highly "in love." The Christian temper is declaratory, not only of our love of God, but of our love of man. It is amiable; it is ex-

* Ver. 16. † 1 Pet. iii. 8. ‡ Eph. v. 2.
§ 1 Thess. iv. 9. ‖ 1 Thess. v. 11, 13.

cellent.

MED. XXX.

cellent. It is a mark of true *politeness*, as well as of true religion. And when we behold moroseness in any shape become habitual in old age, we have reason to fear that the beam of heaven is wanting to soften that ruggedness of nature, which is the bane of all moral and religious improvement.

There is another light indeed in which we may view persons of advanced age indulging habits of complaint, with more forbearance, and sometimes perhaps with profitable attention. In doing this we must study the peculiar *character* they sustain. They are frequently men of understanding who, through a long life, have marked with an accurate eye the manners of the world, as the fluctuation of time has brought them before their eyes. Their observations therefore, we may imagine to have been many and just; but with this deduction that, the prejudices of their youth, have not been obliterated by their age. No fashions are, with them, like past fashions; no wisdom like ancient wisdom. Hence they complain, not ignorantly, nor always petulantly, but *comparatively*, and therefore not always justly. The race of common men are incapable

MED. XXX.

capable of making accurate reflections. A dull monotony regulates their actions. Their ideas are under the controul of the reigning fashion, and they shift the scene without perceiving the change. Among such, the persons whom I describe are seldom found. But let not the superiority of their minds and understandings become an apology for their faults. For whatever abilities the—*laudatores temporis acti*,—the *praisers of past times*, may attribute to themselves, and to the *happy* age in which they were born, let them remember that it is the use which they have made of their wisdom that can alone recommend them to the notice of present times. The moderns will think for themselves as the ancients have thought for *themselves*: and if their children and grandchildren do not perceive an improvement of character suitable to their years and experience, if their neighbours and friends see not something more than primitive language and antiquated manners, they will have reason to doubt the superior wisdom of former days, and the pre-eminent advantages to be derived from a length of years. The influence of early life will indeed be

MED. XXX.

admitted, but if the warm impression of the mind does not bring with it what is worth the carriage, may we not reasonably conclude that their days have been idly spent, and that they act the part of one who "deceiveth, and saith, am I not in sport*?"

I cannot meditate on the latter life of man without lamenting propensities, which have become crimes by indulgence. Thus does sin cheat us in every period of our existence. If the imagination of our juvenile years lead us astray, are we less liable to deception, though from another quarter, when we are on the borders of the grave? I have seen the aged *Simulator* on the bed of death.—Welcome then, Simplicity! thou angel of the Gospel, and ornament of old age! welcome those pure manners and that unadulterated conversation which so well become the hoary head! welcome that self-gratulation which is only to be found in the sentiment and feeling of the venerable Apostle.—"Our rejoicing is this, the testimony of our conscience, that in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly

* Prov. xxvi. 19.

"wis-

" wisdom, but by the grace of God, we have " had our conversation in the world *." MED. XXX.

May such be my reflection on the bed of death! while life remains may I be allowed to correct every bad habit, and to renounce every dangerous and seducing vice! *Both* I feel oppressive. May he who removes the heavy burthen, come to *my* assistance! —" Woe unto thee, O Jerusalem! wilt thou " not be made clean? *When* shall it once " be †?"

* 2 Cor. i. 12. † Jer. xiii. 27.

MEDITATION XXXI.

On the bad Habits and Vices of Old Age.

But is there yet no other way, besides
These painful passages, how we may come
To death, and mix with our connat'ral dust?
There is————if thou well observe
The rule of *not too much*—

MILTON.

MED. XXXI.

IN discussing the bad habits and vices of old age, it is melancholy to contemplate that weakness of human nature which continues our companion through a long life, and does not lose its influence on the border of eternity. A more striking proof than this there cannot be of the original corruption of man; for unless the baneful effects of intemperate passion were but too manifest in our connection with the world, it would not have been considered a moral

a moral duty to have repressed them. MED. XXXI.
Temptation to sin watches us at every turn. Religion enjoins us to resist it; and at the same time, shews that, we are prone to wickedness, by the fear which it expresses lest we should violate our duty; which is made further evident by the difficulties which we feel in preserving ourselves from the danger of vicious excess. That virtue which consists in moderation would not have been required, if the vice which originates in intemperance had not been expressive of our original depravity.

The perverse will of man gravitates towards this center, and is only prevented from rushing into the very depth of destruction by the means which revelation supplies. In our observations on life this forms the distinctive difference between good and bad. An attention to the true motives on which they are founded gives the *character* to our habits, and determines their moral quality. Vice always remains the same under every modification. It must always be considered as guilty of offence, and therefore always liable to punishment. But *habit* takes its character from

MED. XXXI.

from its association. If it would escape censure, it should be select in its companions.

Long acquaintance with either good or bad qualities, proverbially forms a *second nature*. While our reason allows us to make the observation, let our reason direct us in the best course. But as we often see reason fail in directing us to *habit*, let us add that which will never fail, the certain and determinate will of God.

Let us pursue the old man's habits a little further, and try them by this rule. The contemplation of virtue, if we are followers of good habits, may keep us stedfast in our duty, and the consciousness of fault, if we are unhappily the slaves of bad habit, may tend by divine grace to reclaim us. In either, case, let the event be prosperous, and our meditation will not have been in vain.

The old man is *selfish*. Why? The infirmities of his age demand his peculiar care; for it is reasonable to imagine that as his natural powers decay, he requires adventitious aid. The principle may in some sort be

be good, but the application is erroneous. He centers *all* within himself, and adopts a narrow policy lest he should fall into the opposite extreme, and neglect himself at a period of life, and under circumstances, which, he imagines, require his first attention. But the definition of the word *selfishness* unhappily implies, not only an attention to our own interest, but an inattention to that of others. The Scripture rule of *good-will towards men* however admits of *no* exceptions. The selfish therefore stand convicted both before God and man of transgressing a positive beneficial law. When our foot is treading on our grave, what can make us selfish? What is the fruitful valley or the rich estate to him, it has been often asked, for whom a few paces of mother earth will soon suffice * ?

MED. XXXI.

* " I give and I devise (old Euclio said
" And sigh'd) my lands and tenements to Ned.
" Your money, sir?—My money, sir, what all?
" Why—if I must—(then wept) I give it Paul.
" The manor, sir!—The manor! hold, he cry'd,
" Not that—I cannot part with that—and dy'd."
POPE'S MORAL ESSAYS.

In

MED. XXXI.

In the same view, the old man grows *suspicious*. His eyes and ears fail; and having lost his confidence in some men, he becomes doubtful of all.—Here I must adopt the strong language of the poet—

> " Beware of Jealousy!
> " It is a green eyed monster."——

A more baleful dæmon haunts not the last years of man. It is a wound in social life which never closes. The open friend is received as the concealed enemy, and the warmest expression of kindness and affection is rejected, as if accompanied with *design*. What can this mean? If it be not radical corruption, I know not what is.—Turn to the book of God—examine the holy oracles—fortify thy breast with the extensive love of Christ, and the love of man, warmly and liberally, will revive within thee.

The same ill-regulated disposition in old age will produce other great and personal evils.—The drooping body feels the necessity of additional support? What is the consequence? An immoderate indulgence in meats and drinks. Disease is thus gene-

rated by the very food it feeds on. If temperance were not a virtue, it would be esteemed our best physician. To clog the body with an exuberance of food, and to make our meals the great objects of our lives, is a degrading state of man. Is that to go *unclouded into the presence of our Maker?* Much less to approach him, as we must do in the last stage of life, exhilarated by a false animation, or oppressed by a deleterious drug?

MED. XXXI.

To speak out plainly, *drinking* is an encroaching habit of an old man. The gratification which it appears to afford in elevating the decaying spirits, and drowning uneasy thought, seduces the sounder faculties of the mind by the offer of a temporary relief. The practice is not only deceitful, but dangerous. Destructive of the body, perilous to the soul. The animal part soon falls a sacrifice; that noble principle of man, the immortal *mind, has gone before.*

I may be allowed, too, to put the aged on their guard against the unkind practice of those who are called, and many of them perhaps are, faithful servants, that encourage this habit in old masters, who no longer

MED. XXXI.

longer possess courage or resolution to oppose it. At the close of a long life many are left solely to the care of servants. The old man feels his dependence on some favourite assistant; happy if that assistant prove the *faithful* friend. Let the last glimmering of reason, the last ray of religion, the last hope of salvation, be strongly excited in the old man's breast, to check the dangerous application of intoxicating liquors. Behold the pleasing picture of temperate age!

> " Though I look old, yet I am strong and lusty:
> " For in my youth I never did apply
> " Hot and rebellious liquors in my blood!
> " Nor did I with unbashful forehead woo
> " The means of weakness and debility;
> " Therefore my age is as a lusty winter,
> " Frosty, but kindly."—

When we turn our eye on protracted life, evil habits multiply around us. Hardly sensible of the fault, the old man is frequently betrayed into the sin. Less able to resist, he invites indulgence; and, with, or without an apology, continues the old man's customs. Among other considerations, it is

MED. XXXI.

is most remarkable that *avarice* should become a prevailing vice in the decline of life. "This," says Dr. Johnson, "is the citadel "of the dotard, the last fortress to which "age retires*." It is, in truth, the mis-use of a wise dispensation of Providence: and, like selfishness the erroneous and perverted consequence of a salutary principle. Industry is the virtue of our maturer years; and to provide against the decrepitude of age, is a moral precept and our bounden duty. But when we fear to use what we have honestly acquired, and accumulate with distressing parsimony what we never can enjoy—is the folly or the fault most to be condemned? But the blindness of the situation is so remarkable, that it is difficult, I may almost say, impossible, to persuade any man that he is *covetous*. His own wants, his son's wants, the wants of a family, the expectation of posthumous fame, or what is still more incongruous the intention of *posthumous* charity, are all seductive imaginations, and preserve the accumulating principle warm within the breast. A fear of

* Rambler, lxix.

poverty

MED. XXXI.

poverty has been known to exist in the midst of well-stored coffers; and from the cottage to the palace we may select instances where life itself has been sacrificed, by a reluctance to procure the very means of preserving it.

The *world*, the *world* possesses all their heart. This is the solution of this great enigma. The covetous have so long pursued the beaten track of wealth, have so long felt its convenience, and reposed so sweetly upon its pleasures, that even the prospect of a future state, and a consciousness that *they can carry nothing away with them when they die, neither can their pomp follow them*, make no impression on their established habits and inveterate vices.

"All these things will I give thee," said the tempter, "if thou wilt fall down and "worship me."—"Get thee hence, Satan," said Christ, "Thou shalt worship the Lord "thy God, and him *only* shalt thou serve*."

"Great and glorious Lord God, who "alone art worthy of our love and service, "cure me of, and preserve me from, the

* Matt. iv. 10.

"sin

" sin and vanity of admiring the world. MED. XXXI.
" Give me, O Lord, the eyes of faith, that
" I may see the world just as it is; the
" vanity of its promises, the folly of its
" pleasures, the unprofitableness of its re-
" wards, the multitudes of its snares, and
" the dangers of its temptations. *Give me*
" *grace* to renounce all covetous desires, all
" love of riches and pleasures;—to desire
" only what is necessary, and to be content
" with what thou, O Lord, thinkest so.
" Not to be troubled at the loss, or want
" of any thing besides thy favour. That
" no business, no pleasures may divert me
" from the thoughts of the world to come.—
" That I may chearfully part with all these
" things, when thou requirest it of me. And
" that I may ever be prepared to do so, dis-
" pose me to a *temperance in all things*, and
" to lay up my treasure in heaven for Jesus
" Christ's sake. *Amen* *."

* Bishop Wilson's Sacra Privata.

MEDI-

MEDITATION XXXII.

On the Inconsideration of Old Age.

'Tis greatly wise to talk with our past hours,
And ask them what report they bore to heaven;
And how they might have borne more welcome news—
Who knows not this; though gray, is still a child.

YOUNG.

MED. XXXII.

DID the latter period of life bring with it the full force of reflection, much unnecessary discussion might be prevented. But the very circumstance of *habit* implies inconsideration. An habitual action makes no impression on the mind; or at least it rests so slightly on the understanding, as to leave no lasting trace behind it. Even serious duties which are *habitually* performed, require more than an ordinary degree of attention. When vices then become habitual, do

do we wonder to find them passed over as common occurrences, much less remembered as grievous faults? No observation on the conduct of man is more obvious than this. It is indeed in every one of us the subject of daily experience, and we run the race of many an inveterate habit, before we know it, or at least acknowledge it, to be a sin. MED. XXXII.

No day passes but the grave man has occasion to reprove the thoughtlessness of youth. If he proceeded to the thoughtlessness of advanced age, his admonition would be equally needful. It is no matter whether real or fancied business occupy our time, if it direct our thoughts from their proper channel. It may be said perhaps that an old man *cannot but think*. "True!" says the contemplating Dr. Young, a sound and accurate observer, "but to live as we ought "requires constant, if not intense thinking. "The shortness and uncertainty of life is "so evident that all take it for granted that "it wants no proof; and what follows? "Why this; because it wants no proof, "therefore we give it no attention; that we "think not of it at all, for a very odd "reason,

MED. XXXII.

" reason, because we should think of nothing " else *."

What is it which makes every subject familiar to the mind, every object of contemplation to be apprehended by the understanding? It is *thought:* it is frequent and attentive meditation upon it; bringing every bearing into consideration, and trying it by every rule. In affairs of business this is usual; and he would be esteemed negligent of his charge, and improper for his situation, who should enter upon it without this precaution. What charge then is of so much importance as the charge of the soul? Do we inquire about *that?* Are we solicitous of knowing *of what* we are compounded? or does the *body* engross all our care? Youth is seldom inquisitive about such subjects. Manhood *has not time* to attend to them. Old age finding them too deep, or too troublesome for reflection, passes them by with Felix's remark—" when " I have a convenient season, I will call for " thee †." One would almost suppose from

* Young's Corr. Richardson's Letters, vol. ii. p. 20.

† Acts xxiv. 25.

such

such inconsideration, that the existence of the human soul was an imaginary belief. If the aged man does not think it necessary to inquire, "Why am I here? and whither "am I going? Have I, or have I not, a "spiritual, as well as a temporal state of "being?"—we might conclude that he remained at least doubtful of any future condition of man. But I verily believe that there are thousands who acknowledge that there will be an hereafter, who do not, perhaps they dare not, meditate on its peculiar circumstances; and who certainly do not act in conformity to their belief. MED. XXXII.

There cannot be a more awful contemplation than that of *the soul:* and surely, when man is on the point of entering into an eternal state, a state which he may believe but cannot comprehend; when, if he exist at all, he must exist in happiness or misery, and that, not by means of his body which shall die, but by that spiritual principle, that spiritual substance which we term the soul, which must survive, the impression must be deep and strong, and cannot but influence the whole of *thought.* "The "Lord God formed man out of the dust

MED. XXXII.

"of the ground, and breathed into his "nostrils the breath of life"—this was the origin of his body—"and man became a "living soul*"—this was the origin of his soul. That which united these two substances was the breath of God. The soul came not from the earth, but was infused by the inspiration of the Almighty. Thus clear is revelation on this important point, and holds out a subject for profound meditation.

But clear as this inference may be thought, the language of Scripture makes it still clearer, and through the whole of the sacred writings displays the *intrinsic value of the soul.* "The redemption of your soul is pre-"cious†."—"Receiving the end of your "faith, even the salvation of your souls‡." What greater value can be attributed to the soul than that it was thought worthy to be redeemed by the precious blood of God's well-beloved Son? This is a great mystery, but it is an everlasting truth. "Fear not "them that kill the body, but are not able

* Gen. ii. 7. See Patrick in locum.

† Ps. xlix. 8. ‡ 1 Pet. i. 9.

" to kill the soul; but rather fear him which MED. XXXII.
" is able to destroy both body and soul in
" hell *."

Here is important food for the old man's contemplation: not merely to amuse himself with metaphysical arguments on the nature of the human soul, not to philosophize on subjects that are too hard for him, but soberly, piously, and practically to apply, what revelation has thus set before him.

Every considerate man feels within himself a spiritual energy which continually presses him to make inquiries concerning the state of his soul. He is not easy under a partial scrutiny. He tries himself as if he stood before the bar of God. His belief is fixed: his proof is certain. He knows that he has a soul to be saved. It is therefore no ordinary consideration with him how that may be accomplished. He *talks with his past hours*, that his future hours may tell a different tale. His greatest earthly care is the fear of falling back into a thoughtless state, and not *feeling sin*. This he justly dreads from its inevitable consequences. The

* Matt. x. 28.

MED. XXXII.

hardened heart is his abhorrence. He is feelingly alive to the admonition of the good Apostle—"This I say therefore, and testify "in the Lord, that ye henceforth walk not "as other Gentiles walk, in the vanity of "their mind, having the understanding "darkened, being alienated from the life "of God through the ignorance that is "in them, because of the blindness of their "heart: who, being *past feeling*, have "given themselves over unto lasciviousness, to work all uncleanness with greediness *."

It is unaccountable on any other principle but that which acknowledgeth "*the* "*infection of nature*, yea, in them that are "regenerated †," that old men, even in the last stage of life, are too often, not simply unprepared, but unconcerned for eternity. Unaccustomed to reflect, their minds continue blank; interested in the passing scene, and having been long engaged in pursuits not much varied in circumstance, and not at all in importance, their feeble thoughts follow in the beaten track, and

* Eph. iv. 17, 18, 19. † Article IX.

expect

expect no more to-morrow than they have met with to-day. The man of ordinary understanding, who, through want of spiritual energy, declines to "*stir up the gift* "*which is in him**," will feel himself involved in all the censures of this description.

But what shall we say of that old man who, with talents that could have adorned the most elevated, and improved the most arduous situation, with a knowledge that could have directed empires, yet could not direct himself? What shall we say of him who has been successful in every worldly pursuit, and yet has not attended, in any one instance, to the pursuit of eternity? The profound philosopher, the learned lawyer, the skilful politician, the judicious physician, may answer this inquiry at their leisure. The acute theologian, too, though the bent of his studies, it may be imagined, would lead to a different conclusion, may strictly examine himself on this subject: neither let him have occasion to say in the heaviness of his heart, and in the urgency of his spiritual inquiry—"They made

* 2 Tim. i. 6.

"me

MED. XXXII.

"me keeper of the vineyard, but mine own "vineyard have I not kept*."

What reflection can be made that will bring comfort to the heart under such circumstances, when gray hairs are upon us? Yet some prayer must be offered, or our case is desperate indeed. Could we anticipate the doubts, the fears, the anxieties that attend old age after the most successful prosecution of all the intoxicating vanities of life, we should but little envy what has been called, a life of pleasure.

Look upon such an old man in his closet, and communing with his God. The situation is interesting and affecting. Hear his language; and weep thyself to penitence.—"Oh! Almighty Being! How shall I look "up towards thee, when I reflect that I am "of no consideration but as I have of-"fended? My existence, oh my God, with-"out thy mercy, is not to be prolonged in "this, or another world, but for my punish-"ment. I apprehend, oh my Maker, let "it not be too late, I apprehend and "tremble at thy presence; and shall I not

* Cant. i. 6.

"con-

" consider thee, who art all goodness, but MED.
" with terror? Oh! my Redemer, do thou XXXII.
" behold my anguish. Turn to me thou Sa-
" viour of the world; who has offended like
" me! Oh my God, I cannot fly out of thy
" presence, let me fall down in it: I humble
" myself in contrition of heart; but alas!
" I have not only swerved from thee, but
" have laboured against thee. If thou dost
" pardon what I have committed, how wilt
" thou pardon what I have made others
" commit? I have rejoiced in ill as in a
" prosperity. Forgive, oh my God, all who
" have offended by my persuasion, all who
" have transgressed by my example. Canst
" thou, oh God, accept of the confession of
" old age, to expiate all the labour and
" industry of youth spent in transgressions
" against thee? While I am still alive, let
" me implore thee to recall to thy grace all
" whom I have made to sin. Let, oh Lord,
" thy goodness admit of his prayer for their
" pardon, by whose instigation they have
" transgressed: accept, oh God, of this in-
" terval of age, between my sinful days and
" the hour of my dissolution, to wear away
" the corrupt habits in my soul, and pre-

" pare

MED. XXXII.

" pare myself for the mansions of purity " and joy. Impute not to me, oh my God, " the offences I may give, after my death, " to those I leave behind me; let me not " transgress when I am no more seen; but " prevent the ill effects of my ill-applied " studies, and receive me into thy mercy*."

* Guardian, No. 81.

NOTE—

The valuable, but unequal, poet whose lines I have often had occasion to quote, says, " A death-bed's a de- " tector of the heart." How strongly is this illustrated in the following extract of a letter from a once celebrated character * to a noble friend, a very short period before his decease, when that awful event was almost daily expected!

" MY VERY GOOD LORD,

" This being the last time, that, in all pro- " bability, I shall ever put pen to paper, I thought it my " duty to employ it in writing to you; since I am now " going to a place whence I can administer no advice to " you, and all the rest who survive me are obliged to come " sooner or later.—The decays of nature tell me that I " cannot live long. Give me leave therefore once for all,

* Dr. Radcliffe.

" and

" and to use my endeavours to prolong your life, that MED. XXXII.
" cannot add a span's length to my own.—Your Lord-
" ship knows how far an air of jollity has obtained amongst
" you and your acquaintance, and how many of them, in
" a few years, have died martyrs to excess: let me con-
" jure you, therefore, for *the good of your own soul*, the
" preservation of your health, and the benefit of the pub-
" lic, to deny yourself the destructive liberties you have
" hitherto taken, and of which *I must confess with an*
" *heart full of sorrow*, I have been too great a partaker
" in your company.—For you are to consider (oh! that
" I myself had done so!) that men, especially those of
" your exalted rank, are *born to nobler purposes than*
" *those of eating and drinking;* and that by how much
" more eminent your station is, by so much the more
" accountable will you be for the discharge of it. Nor
" will your duty to God, your country, or yourself, per-
" mit you to anger the *first*, in robbing the *second* of a
" patriot, by not taking a due care of the *third*, which
" will be accounted downright murder in the eyes of that
" incensed Deity that will most assuredly revenge it.—
" The pain that afflicts my nerves interrupts me in making
" any other request to you, than that your Lordship
" would give credit to the words of a dying man, who is
" fearful that he has been in a great measure an abetter
" and encourager of your intemperance, and would there-
" fore *in these his last moments*, when he is most to be
" credited, dehort you from the pursuit of it; and that in
" these the days of *your youth*—for you have many years yet
" to live, if you do not hasten your own death—you would
" give ear to the voice of the preacher, whom you and I,
" with the rest of your company, have in the midst of
" our debauches, made light of for saying, ' Rejoice, oh

" ' young

MED. XXXII.

" ' young man, in thy youth; and let thy heart cheer thee
" ' in the days of thy youth, and walk in the ways of
" ' thy heart, and in the sight of thine eyes; but know
" ' thou, that for all these things, God will bring thee
" ' into judgment.' On which day, when the hearts of all
" men shall be laid open, may you and I, and all that
" sincerely repent of acting contrary to the *revealed will*
" in this life, reap the fruits of our sorrows for our mis-
" deeds in a blessed resurrection."

MEDITATION XXXIII.

The Old Man's Distresses.

When men once reach their autumn, sickly joys
Fall off apace, as yellow leaves from trees,
At every *little breath* misfortune blows;
Till quite left naked of their happiness,
In the chill blasts of winter they expire.
This is the common lot.—

YOUNG.

AMONGST the difficulties with which our human nature is tried in the decline of life, we may reckon the inquiry, how to bear misfortunes when age is less able to resist them? It has been the plan of these Meditations to answer this question by a general delineation of old age, as well as sometimes to select particular instances of contemplation. From both, divine instruction springs: for what we see not in one example, we may find

MED. XXXIII.

MED. XXXIII.

find in many; and what many may not afford, one illustrious instance may abundantly supply. But in whatever view, or in whatever situation we may place the difficulties of advanced life, one remedy alone will meet them all. Make true religion your foundation, and you may build upon it the most permanent structure. Whatever occurs in life, if your foundation be well laid, all things will work together for good. I am not indeed so much of an Utopian as to imagine that there is no evil in misfortune, nor yet so much of a philosopher, as to suppose that if misfortune comes, I may be steeled against its power. The breast of man is made of other materials. He cannot but *feel:* but it is a duty to feel as a *Christian* ought—to *weep* indeed like Jesus, but like Jesus to exclaim, "not as I will, but as "thou wilt *."

Under this impression, what may not man endure? Cherish the spiritual part, and temporal suffering will even become a blessing. This has been experienced by the pious. Had not this been intended in the order of

* John ii. 35. Matt. xxvi. 39.

Pro-

Providence, an easier proof of our obedience would have been required. MED. XXXIII.

But, time hurries on, and distresses accumulate. This awful hour then calls forth our Christian resources. Despair forms no part of true Christianity: but *hope* does—that "hope of eternal life, which God, that "cannot lie, promised before the world be-"gan *." This will be a barrier of inestimable importance against the encroachments of natural distress. A mind, qualified by this grace, will be able to make strong resistance, even amidst many personal weaknesses.

Let not the old man shun the contemplation of his numerous deprivations; for to be deprived of contemporary friends, and contemporary comforts, is the inevitable lot of protracted life.—

———"Smitten friends
"Are angels, sent on errands full of love:
"For us they languish, and for us they die †."

Instead of trembling at a friend's death, let the good old man rejoice that it is the

* Tit. i. 2. † Young.

fore-

MED. XXXIII.

forerunner of his own. Let him learn to look on death with smiling feature; which he can never do but "by him, who, through "death, destroyed him that had the power "of death, that is, the Devil*." Doubtless the blow which separates friends, whose affectionate attachments have been long rivetted by time, must be severely felt, and will be long remembered; but after the first burst of grief, the melancholy is pleasing, and pious age recurs to such recollections, as a solace of worldly cares, with a vigour apparently more suitable for youth. How consistent this, with the benevolence of divine Providence! The good man cannot even descend into the grave without some appropriate comfort. I may produce one instance—(more than one might be added)—where a pious old man had erected in a private and shady walk of his garden, an urn with an inscription to the memory of his departed friends. "Yet from this walk, "from the indulgence of the remembrance "and regrets which it inspired, he would "return to the social circle within, with

* Heb. ii. 14.

"unbroken

" unbroken spirits, and unabated cheerful- MED. XXXIII.
" ness." A manuscript note, written not long before the death of this valuable person, explains his amiable feelings, and demands the sympathetic tear as well as the sympathetic pleasure. " The lenient hand " of time," says he, after mentioning the death of his wife and children, and feeling, I doubt not, the true motive of tranquillity. —" The lenient hand of time, and affec- " tionate care of my remaining children, " and the duty which calls on my exertion " for them, have by degrees restored me to " myself. The memory of these dear ob- " jects gone before me, and the soothing " hope that we shall soon meet again, is " now the source of extreme pleasure to " me. In my retired walks in the country, " I am never alone; those dear shades are " my constant companions! Thus what I " looked upon as a bitter calamity is now " become to me the chief pleasure of life*."

After recording so tender a delight, can I resist the insertion of the sweet lines of

* Mackenzie's Works. Memoirs of Tytler, vol. vii. p. 175.

Cowper,

MED. XXXIII. Cowper, and apply them with all their energy to my heart?—

> " Stillness, accompanied with sounds so soft,
> " Charms more than silence. Meditation here
> " May think down hours to moments. Here the heart
> " May give a useful lesson to the head,
> " And learning wiser grow without her book."

But may not the loss of friends be aggravated by the reflection that they have not been *pious* friends? I would not wish to open fresh wounds of distress in the breast of the aged man; on the contrary, I would obviate as much as possible any consideration that would give him pain, consistent with that duty which inexorable truth demands. If the conviction that a child's ill conduct will break a parent's heart, can make any serious impression, I would write it *for that child's sake.* But the object of my present care is to comfort the pious parent, rather than to attempt to reclaim the rebellious child. The only consolation indeed which the case affords is this. In a future world our natural passions will be extinguished, so far as worldly affections are concerned, such of them as essentially conduce to our

happiness, in a state of pure refinement, will undoubtedly be retained; and such only; for our will will be wholly, and unequivocally, resolved into the will of God. As we shall then have no union which is not founded on our union with God, the relative connection of father, son, and brother, and the reciprocal engagement of conjugal endearment, will be all absorbed in the same holy principle. Under this impression we may reasonably suppose that none will be distinguished in that day by a painful compassion, or an unavailing regret. Implicit acquiescence will be as certainly demanded, as it will be readily and chearfully yielded.—"It is the Lord: let him do "what seemeth him good*."

MED. XXXIII.

But besides the loss of friends, we may be affected by the loss of *estate*.—If I addressed youth, I should recommend renewed endeavours, and salutary exertion to recover it; not indeed for the sake of any intrinsic happiness which riches may confer, but as a duty to be performed for the useful purposes of society. A man may be rich with-

* 1 Sam. iii. 18.

MED. XXXIII.

out being worldly. At present, however, I turn my eye on him whose riches have left him; at a time, too, when all other earthly enjoyments are about to depart from him for ever. On the most rational ground let him inquire, what has he to regret? Does he ever remember a time when he could want them less? The mere wants of nature are small, and soon supplied. Its artificial wants are exorbitant, unnecessary, and generally pernicious. They originate in vanity; they terminate in vexation of spirit. What says the Apostle? "having food and "raiment, let us be therewith content*." Others besides him, have "taken joyfully "the spoiling of their goods, knowing that "they have in heaven a better and an en-"during substance†."

Old age hath turned us out of many satisfactions.—That it hath deprived us of one more, should be matter of no surprize. or lamentation. The time is past when the world's goods could be best used to the world's advantage. Our hands are now feeble, and our body frail. Let us resign

* 1 Tim. vi. 8 † Heb. x. 34.

them

them to those who can apply them better. —Strong as this argument is, such is the weakness of our nature, that all this may not be accomplished without a struggle. We have hard, impenetrable hearts, which must be wholly subdued, before they will bend to our situation. We are old in age, let us be young in resolution. The trial of our faith is come—let us not faint in the day of battle. MED. XXXIII.

To enumerate all the particulars of an old man's distresses, offers no grateful subject for recollection; for of all the bitter tears that are shed, none are so bitter as those which fall from an old man's eyes. But in his heaviest hours, if he cherish the wisdom which cometh from above, if he welcome into his breast the divine spirit of grace, he can never want consolation.

The Saviour of the world, at an early period of his natural life, was marked by a deep expression of aged sorrow. His appearance was fully answerable to the prophetical description of the expected Messiah—"His visage was so marred more than "any man, and his form more than the "sons of men."—"He was truly a man of

MED. XXXIII.

" sorrows and acquainted with grief*." His grief and sorrow sprung from the contemplation of a wicked world, from which he himself was separate. The best of aged men must bear a different character. They may weep for sin, and truly may they weep; for their own sin must be included. This consideration will necessarily add a wrinkle to the most unclouded brow. But let them not sorrow as men without hope. Let them " consider him, who endured such contra- " diction of sinners against himself that " they may neither be wearied nor faint in " their minds †."

The tender compassion of Christ is displayed to men of every age. He who protected us in our cradle will not forsake us on the bed of death: for " having loved " his own, he will love them to the end ‡." The old man may safely rest the most grievous of his distresses on this issue. There is nothing in his situation, but may be relieved by this remedy. There is nothing in his nature different from that of other men. *This is the common lot.* " There hath no

* Is. lii. 14. liii. 2. † Heb. xiii. 3.
‡ John xiii. 1.

" temp-

" temptation taken you but such as is com- MED. XXXIII.
" mon to man, but God is faithful who will
" not suffer you to be tempted above that
" you are able to bear, but will with the
" temptation also make a way to escape,
" that ye may be able to bear it *."

Meditate on the character of Christ as connected with your own, and receive comfort from the *power* of his religion. Hath the revolution of many years taken away your friends? Christ was much shorter lived than you, and had no friend to comfort him. Even his disciples forsook him, and fled from him in his distress. Yet he neither repined nor despaired: *he opened not his mouth.* He did more, he laid down his life for them: and " greater love hath
" no man than this, that a man lay down
" his life for his friends †." You are not called upon, whatever your distresses may be, to die, either with, or for, your friends: but you are required to " *wait*," that is, to conduct yourselves with becoming patience and resignation, " all the days of your ap-
" pointed time till your change come ‡."—

* 1 Cor. x. 13. † John xv. 3.
‡ Job xiv. 14.

Do

MED. XXXIII.

Do you regret the death of a pious friend? Regret it not. God hath resumed his own. Say, with confidence, you *would not call him back, though an hair would turn the scale.* Do you lament the loss of one who was unconverted? Strengthen still more your own converted heart. In his case you may perhaps have doubts. In your own you must be certain.—Hath poverty come upon thee like an armed man? If thou art unarmed, thou canst not resist it: but if thou hast put on the whole armour of God, as thy Christian profession hath taught thee, then mayest thou "be strong in the Lord, "and in the power of his might*." What is poverty? It is a mere negative feeling. I do not deny indeed the severity of privation: but I do deny the weight of all its pressure. We do not require all that the least expecting among us is anxious to possess. Thou art poor! Thou hast not then riches to squander, nor pleasures to pursue; be thankful that thou art at least *so far* from trouble and temptation.—But thy poverty is oppressive! thou art aged and

* Eph. v. 10.

distressed!

distressed!—consider it as thy last trial, and it will prove thy best possession.—As a rich man, Christ could not have accomplished all he did for the redemption of the world. The treasure which he possessed from his union with the Father, he deposited at the foot of the cross. "Being rich, yet "for your sakes he became poor, that ye, "through his poverty might be rich *." If your poverty, connected as it may be with age and infirmities, bring forth in you the fruit of righteousness, "blessed shall be thy "basket †," whatever it may contain. The few years which thou hast yet to number will not detain thee long from *treasures* of a different nature, where thou shalt know and feel "the love of Christ which passeth "knowledge, and shalt be filled with all "the fulness of God ‡."

MED. XXXIII.

May I look forward to distresses with a steady eye, and still more steady heart! God has not called me to unvaried pleasure; he has dealt more kindly with me, and taught me that sufferings are good. But while I am conscious that my portion of

* 2 Cor. viii. 9. † Deut. xxviii. 5.
‡ Eph. iii. 19.

sorrow

MED. XXXIII.

sorrow has been less than I deserve, much less than that of thousands which I see around me, I have great reason to be thankful for the mercies of forbearance. How good is God who has put such consoling words into the mind of his Apostle that, he should forgive and comfort a penitent offender, "lest he should be swallowed up of "overmuch sorrow *."

* 2 Cor. ii. 7.

MEDI-

MEDITATION XXXIV.

The Old Man contemplating the Dead.

Believe, and look with transport on the tomb!

YOUNG.

A GENERAL idea of death enters into most men's contemplation, but being, as it were, diffused over a large surface, the impression is weak and the effect transient. We hear of the remains of thousands scattered upon a field of battle; we are told of as many more vanishing from the face of the earth in some sweeping calamity. We may sigh but we do not weep. But if from these multitudes of slain, one object only is brought before our *eyes*, whether dear to us as our own souls, or demanding merely the common offices of humanity, our feelings take a different cast, and the gush of sympathy

MED. XXXIV.

MED. XXXIV.

sympathy overwhelms us with affliction. This distinction, or rather variation of our natural sensations, teaches us an important lesson, and admonishes us not to shun the sight of individual woe.

The kindness of Providence distinguishes itself even here. In a world where mortality is daily felt, perpetual grief would be a daily misfortune. But lest hardness of heart should be the consequence of the constant recurrence of such melancholy spectacles, our sympathetic feelings are only exercised on *particular* occasions, that they may sink more deeply into our minds, and leave a warning beneficial to our hearts.

" If thou hast ever seen another die, let " not the impression of that most interest- " ing sight be effaced from thy heart; but " remember that through the same vale of " darkness, thou must pass from this state " of existence to the next*." How wise and happy is that aged man, who hath so far conquered the fear of death, as to contemplate with complacency the remains of a departed friend, and to look with trans-

* Payne's Thomas a Kempis, b. i. p. 23.

port

port on the tomb! That which alone can work this miracle in man is *faith*. Those who have no hope, have no confidence: and I envy not that man the apathy of his disposition, who can see the grave close over, even a stranger, without emotion. But if we examine our own hearts, we shall not find this conquest easy. Our faith is weak; and we must believe, firmly and freely believe, before we can firmly and freely pronounce, *Blessed are the dead!* MED. XXXIV.

I have been walking with aged friends for some time, under the shadow of a venerable tree, in the cloister, or in the chamber. I now intreat their attendance in the sacred cemetery, apart from worldly forms and contemplating the dead. I lead them not here with a gloomy imagination, or with the most distant intention of impressing their minds with horror. But I would instil into their hearts, as well as my own, that reverence and decorum which the awful situation demands. Though we have often talked of death, we have not often seen the grave. *Behold it here!* Though we have often professed a contempt for the world when we have been disgusted with its

MED. XXXIV.

its vanities, we have not often seen its termination. *Behold it here!* In an hasty hour we have wished for death when we should have prayed for holiness; and have looked on the latter end of life as on the beginning, with indifference, because we have expected continually to find "to-"morrow as this day, and much more "abundant*." But to-morrow has now passed away for ever to him whose next foot-step descends into the grave.

Here rest, my friends! and if your inquiry be with Job, "If a man die shall he "live again†?"—let this answer be your comfort, "I know that my Redeemer liveth, "and that he shall stand at the latter day "upon the earth, and though after my skin "worms shall destroy this body, yet in my "flesh I shall see God, whom I shall see "for myself, and mine eyes shall behold "and not another‡."—"I am the resurrec-"tion and the life," saith the Lord; "he that "believeth in me, though he were dead, "yet shall he live, and he that liveth and "believeth in me, shall never die§."—Here

* Is. lvi. 12.
† Job xiv. 14.
‡ Ib. xix. 25.
§ John xi. 25, 26.

is

is food for contemplation; and, refreshed by this divine food, he that bendeth over the last home of man, shall travel joyfully on the strength of it, through the wilderness of the world, even to Horeb, the mount of God. MED. XXXIV.

But let us not depart hastily from the place of graves. I would not merely attract or amuse the mind by poetical allusion, or endeavour to heighten the magnificent by description. The grave is true: death is true, and needs no embellishments. It is a plain tale told by thousands, and the value of its moral consists in its certainty.—Look then upon the remains of that body; examine the bones of which it has been composed. Is there not contrivance in every part of them? Is there not design? A contemplation of the bones of an human body is said to have converted Galen, and to have obliged him to acknowledge the presence of a Deity. A modern of high celebrity reasons admirably on the uses of the bones; and though he required not that argument to establish his belief in a God, we may conclude from his posthumous theological writings, that it led him to divine truths

MED. XXXIV.

truths which did not appear to have been the result of his more early studies.

"The philosopher," he says, "beholds "with astonishment the production of "things around him. Unconscious particles "of matter take their stations, and severally "range themselves in an order so as to "form collectively plants and animals, i. e. "organized bodies, with parts bearing strict "and evident relation to one another, and "to the utility of the whole: and it should "seem that those particles could not move "in any other way than they do, for they "testify not the smallest sign of choice, or "liberty, or discretion. There may be "plastic natures, particular intelligent be-"ings, guiding their motions in each case: "or they may be the result of trains of "mechanical dispositions fixed beforehand "by an intelligent appointment, and kept "in action by a *power* at the center. But "in either case, there *must be intelligence*." The learned author's conclusion, then, must be ours.—"Upon the whole; after all the "struggles of a reluctant philosophy, the "necessary resort is to a Deity. The "marks of design are too strong to be got "over.

" over. Design must have had a designer. MED. XXXIV.
" That designer must have been a person.
" That person is GOD*."

But admirable and uncontrovertible as this conclusion is, we must not end our contemplation here. We have brought ourselves by rational principles to acknowledge the existence and providence of a God. The same principle, if pursued with an unclouded imagination and a pure heart, will carry us further. Not indeed so far as to unveil the whole hidden wisdom of our Maker, for then we should assume or possess a portion of his omnipotence; but to improve that knowledge with which we are endowed, and to make the way plain before us which leads to as full a disclosure as we are capable of receiving, of all the blessings of God's revealed will. This is not the place to detail all the particulars of this reasoning. The good old man who reads his Bible, in which his long established faith has taught him to delight, adverts at once to this most true and sacred declaration, that " Eternal life is the gift of God,

* Paley's Natural Theology, pp. 461, 473.

" *through*

MED. XXXIV.

"*through Jesus Christ our Lord**." Who brought death into the world, and for what purpose it was brought, are subjects of the same revelation. Connect these with the promise of everlasting life, and the means which God has appointed to establish it, and you have before you an epitome of the Gospel.

The evidence of the resurrection of our Saviour is the evidence of that of every man born into the world. Let the old man then contemplate *his* deserted body lying in the tomb, and suffering the same privations which will shortly be his own. A more interesting and affecting sight could not be presented to his eyes. The mortal nature of his Saviour lies breathless before him. If he has ever wept over a departed friend, let him weep here. But the spark of immortality is not extinguished. "Christ is "risen indeed†!" Here then begins rejoicing. "Now is Christ risen from the "dead, and *become the first fruits of them* "*that slept*‡. Whatever difficulties present themselves to his imagination in medi-

* Rom. vi. 23. † Luke xxiv. 34.
‡ 1 Cor. xv. 20.

tating

tating on the resurrection, let him reflect that nothing is difficult to *almighty power*. If he be inclined to puzzle himself with that sceptical inquiry, "With what bodies do "they come?" Let him remember that the Apostle checks such over-curious questions; not because they cannot be answered, but because in our mortal state we can form no just conceptions of immortality. "*God* "*giveth it a body*"—is within our comprehension; but to understand the nature of that body, we must wait till we are members of that heavenly society. Thus far, however, natural reason assures us, and this assurance is confirmed by every page of Scripture, that whatever be the nature of the body we shall possess, it will undoubtedly be *our own body*: "God giveth "it a body as it hath pleased him, and to "every seed (much more to every man) its "own body*." He shall be conscious to himself that he is the same person that he was before. But so far different shall he *then* be, that none of the infirmities, none of the sufferings, none of the necessities

MED. XXXIV.

* Cor. xv. 38.

MED. XXXIV.

of this life shall interrupt the enjoyment of that. The good man shall be rewarded in his spiritual body, the wicked man shall be punished in it. These plain truths should be plainly understood: and whatever the old man may have thought while contemplating the dead body of his friend, when the vision is opened upon his own bed of death, he will be satisfied with the prospect. "It doth not yet indeed appear," he will say, "what I shall be; "but I know that when Christ shall appear, I shall be like him; for I shall see "him as he is."

Oh! may the blissful vision of our Lord be mine! If it be interesting to contemplate the dead, it is awful to contemplate the resurrection. May the impression be as lasting, as it is strong, so shall I, through my blessed Saviour, die in peace, rest in hope, and rise in glory!

NOTE.—

"In Galen's 'Book De Formatione Fœtûs,' he takes "notice that there are in a human body above 600 se- "veral muscles, and there are at least ten several inten- "tions, or due qualifications to be observed in each of "these; proper figure, just magnitude, right disposition "of

" of its several ends, upper and lower position of the
" whole, the insertion of its proper nerves, veins and arte-
" ries, which are each of them to be duly placed; so that
" about the muscles alone, no less than 6000 several
" ends or aims are to be attended to. The bones are
" reckoned to be 284; the distinct scopes or intentions in
" each of these are above 40, in all about 100,000. And
" thus it is in some proportion with all the other parts,
" the *skin, ligaments, vessels, glandules, humours,* but
" more especially with the several *members* of the body,
" which do in regard of the great variety and multitude of
" those several intentions required to these, very much ex-
" ceed the *homogeneous* parts. And the failing of any of
" these would cause an irregularity in the body, and in
" many of them such as would be very notorious." Bishop Wilkins on the Principles of Natural Religion, p. 81.

MEDITATION XXXV.

The Old Man contemplating the Dead.

Then welcome Death; thy dreaded harbingers,
Age and Disease; Disease, though long my guest;
That plucks my nerves, those tender strings of life,
Which pluckd a little more, will toll the bell,
That calls my few friends to my funeral;
While Reason and Religion, better taught,
Congratulate the dead, and crown his tomb
With wreath triumphant.—

YOUNG.

MED. XXXV.

"I WAS meditating yesterday on death," says a valuable and reflecting female, "till "I felt myself amazed how one could "ever think of conversing on any other "subject—and yet it is almost the only "subject that is never treated of in con- "versation, farther than as an uninteresting "fact. Were any number of persons in- "tended to embark for a diftant unknown "country, of whom *some* might be called "upon to-morrow, and *all* must be called "thither

MED. XXXV.

" thither soon, would they not, whenever
" they met as friends and fellow-travellers,
" be inquiring among themselves how each
" was provided for the journey; what ac-
" counts each had heard of the place; the
" terms of reception; what passports; what
" recommendation; what interest and hopes
" each had secured; what treasures re-
" mitted; what protection insured; and
" excite each other to dispatch what yet
" was possible to be done, and might to-
" morrow be irretrievably too late? Me-
" thinks it would sit pleasantly on the mind,
" when a friend was vanished out of this
" visible world, to have such conversation
" to reflect on.—What astonishing scenes
" are now opened to the minds of many,
" with whom, a few months ago, we used
" familiarly and triflingly to converse!
" With whom we have wasted many an in-
" estimable hour! What clear views have
" they *new* of those great and important
" truths, for which the foolish bustle of the
" world scarce leaves any place in the im-
" mortal mind*."

* Miss Talbot to Mrs. Carter, Letters, vol. i. p. 507, 4to.

The

MED. XXXV.

The simplicity, piety, and wisdom of this reflection are so striking, that we wonder they do not irresistibly interest the attention, whether we are called upon to view the last remains of man, or traverse at random the common walks of life. The business of mortality is continually going forward: and, as we pass along, we daily miss numbers, whose faces have been long familiar to us, and many of whom we have long remembered with affection. But the slight interview is past—"man goeth to "his long home, and the mourners go "about the streets *." The old man cannot be an unconcerned spectator of this scene, and it must reasonably be expected that his turn will soon come in this long procession.

The contemplation of a mixed multitude, connected with the fluctuations of mortality, when death is represented as "shak-"ing his dart over them, but delaying to "strike the blow †," is one of those pictures of the mind which leave no faint impression. The Persian monarch wept

* Eccles. xii. 5. † Milton.

over

MED. XXXV.

over his vast armies on the banks of the Hellespont, when he reflected how soon they would vanish from the earth. The serious Christian too weeps when he contemplates a collected crowd of human beings. But he does so on a different principle: not because he knows that they shall die, but because he fears that many of them may die unprepared for eternity. When the old man's thoughts take this turn, and he considers how few of his contemporaries remain, that perhaps he is the only man of his village, or the second man in his city of the same standing with himself, the warning is obvious. May he improve his situation by increasing piety! May the prospect of his departed, and departing, friends, be available to the confirmation of his faith, the establishment of his hope, and the enlargement of his charity, and then through the means of grace, will the death of his long and well beloved Saviour, be effectual to his redemption! May he thus *go on from strength to strength till unto the God of Gods may every aged man appear in Sion!*

We have seen the old man contemplating his

MED. XXXV.

his dead friends, we have seen him contemplating his dead acquaintance, we have heard his reflections on the death of strangers, and on the general state of the dead. In all these cases, piety and religion have been his dear companions, have composed his spirits, and prepared him for an happy exchange of this world for the next. Let us now place him in another view; a view which will indeed constitute the trial of his faith. Let us behold the old man contemplating his dead *enemies*.—How does he now feel? What tumult possesses his breast? —If he is sensible of no triumph over *these slain*, if he has endeavoured to *seek peace with them, and to ensue it*, if he allows in its fullest extent, the truly Christian maxim, "love worketh no ill to his neighbour*," but perseveres in doing him good to the utmost of his abilities, if he has not spurned aside the offered hand of friendship, nor turned his back on him who has fondly petitioned his forgiveness, then may he behold the dead body of his reputed enemy; with dejection indeed, because there had been enmity

* Rom. xiii. 10.

between

between them, but with no *compunctious visitings of nature*, nor any of the keen sensations of self-reproach. MED. XXXV.

But if the contrary hath happened, and death hath snatched away the object, before the stumbling block of both their consciences is removed, who will envy the survivor's feelings? Ah! poor old man! respect thy gray hairs: forgive, and be forgiven. Thy enemy is dead: but what hast thou gained? A perpetual uneasiness which will end only in thy grave. I know not a more distressing object of contemplation than an *implacable old man*.

How striking is this reflection, if we transfer our thoughts from time to eternity, from the tomb to the resurrection! Then if we inquire with *what bodies* shall we come? and have no doubt of identity of person, as well as of identity of crime? how shall we meet again our departed neighbours! What an interview shall we then have with those whom we have persisted in calling *enemies*, or at least not acknowledging as friends, in the presence of our Maker!—I draw a veil over the scene, as I wish not to behold any man's

gray

MED. XXXV.

gray hairs go down to the grave with sorrow.

The resurrection of the body, (for *the body must arise*, if we are, as the Scripture assures us, to receive reward or punishment for the things done in the body,) places this contemplation in an interesting light. Ezekiel's vision of the valley of bones always impresses my mind with awe. The intention indeed was to represent the restoration of the temporal state of Israel, but the Prophet doubtless had within his view, and certainly represented by analogy, the spiritual restoration, and resurrection of all mankind.

"The hand of the Lord," he says, "was "upon me, and carried me out in the "spirit of the Lord; and set me down in "the midst of the valley, and it was full "of bones. And he caused me to pass by "them round about; and, behold! there "were very many upon the surface of the "valley; and behold! they were very dry. "And he said unto me, 'Son of man! "'shall these bones live?' And I said, "'O Lord Jehovah! thou knowest.' And "he said unto me, 'Prophesy upon these "'bones;

" ' bones; and thou shalt say unto them, MED. XXXV.
" ' O ye dry bones, hear the word of the
" ' Lord;' thus said the Lord Jehovah unto
" these bones, ' O ye dry bones, hear the
" ' word of the Lord.' Thus said the Lord
" Jehovah unto these bones, ' Behold I
" ' am causing to enter into you breath
" ' [or spirit] and ye shall live: and I will
" ' give [or supply] upon you sinews, and
" ' I will bring up flesh upon you, and I
" ' will cover upon you skin: and I will
" ' give breath [or spirit] in you, and ye
" ' shall live, and ye shall know that I am
" ' Jehovah.' And I prophesied as I was
" commanded, and there was a noise as I
" prophesied, and behold! a rushing [or
" rattling sound] and the bones came to-
" gether, bone to its bone. And I looked,
" and behold upon them sinews, and flesh
" arose, and skin closed upon them over
" and above, but no breath [or spirit] was
" in them. And he said unto me, ' Pro-
" ' phesy unto the wind [or breath, or
" ' spirit] prophesy, son of man, and thus
" ' shalt thou say to the wind,' thus saith the
" Lord Jehovah; from the four winds
" come, oh breath, and breathe upon
" these

MED. XXXV.

"these slain, and they shall live. And I "prophesied as he commanded me, and "the breath came into them, and they "stood upon their feet; an exceeding "great army *."

I have recited this prophecy at length that the power of the Almighty may be more conspicuous, when we contemplate the resurrection of the body. How sweetly and emphatically does the evangelical Isaiah confirm the doctrine.—"Thy dead "men shall live, together with my dead "body shall they arise. Awake and sing "ye that dwell in dust; for thy dust is as "the dew of herbs, and the earth shall cast "out the dead †."

—Alas! who can stand when the Lord doeth this!—But remember, old man! that whilst thou art satisfied that thy body shall rise again, the grave hath no power over thy incorruptible soul. Thy mind, and all thy spiritual faculties are inseparably united to that immortal part of thee which will survive the grave. Prepare that part for so heavenly an inheritance.

* Ez. xxxvii. Mr. Granville Sharpe's Trans.

† Is xxvi. 19.

Thou

MED. XXXV.

Thou couldst no more have imagined a restoration of thine intellectual faculties than thou couldst of the bone coming together, *bone to its bone*. Yet both are in the intention of the Almighty. Dispute not then about identity of person, nor discuss circumstances too subtle for thy present limited imagination, but be content with such knowledge as God has been pleased to reveal. If thou hast faith in *him*, who hath opened the kingdom of heaven to all believers, that will be fully sufficient for every purpose both of this world and the next. If thou hast no faith —alas! old man! "who shall deliver thee "from the body of this death*." Shun not then a rational conversation with the dead; shun not a pious contemplation of that state which must open upon us, whether that day approach at a later, or an earlier, period. Believe me that it is a pleasing contemplation, when we consider it as a transition to a far superior condition of existence, a condition not uncertain in its nature, or temporary in its duration,

* Rom. vii. 24.

its

MED. XXXVI.

but the wonderful and unspeakable gift of him "who hath abolished death, and brought "life and immortality to light by the "Gospel *."

"Oh! Thou,
"Whom soft-eyed pity once led down from heaven
"To bleed for man, to teach him how to live,
"And Oh! still harder lesson! how to die;
"Disdain not thou to smooth the restless bed
"Of sickness and of pain. Forgive the tear
"That feeble nature drops: calm all her fears;
"Fix her firm trust on thy triumphant Cross,
"Wake all her hopes and animate her faith;
"Till my wrapt soul, anticipating heaven,
"Bursts from the thraldom of incumb'ring clay,
"And on the wing of ecstacy upborne,
"Springs into Liberty and Light and Life †."

* 2 Tim. i. 10.
† Bp. Porteus' Poem on Death.

MEDI-

MEDITATION XXXVI.

The Old Man's Duties in his last Sickness.

'Tis enough—the hour is come:
Now within the silent tomb
Let this mortal frame decay,
Mingled with its kindred clay;
Since thy mercies oft of old
By thy chosen seers foretold,
Faithful now and stedfast prove,
God of truth, and God of love!

MEYRICK.

SICKNESS, which reduces persons of all ages to the old man's state, places the old man himself on the verge of that eternity, which is the earnest object of his hopes, or the most tremendous of his fears. I will not at this time contemplate a man venerable in years suffering the terrors of a death-bed repentance, because it has been

MED. XXXVI.

MED. XXXVI.

my endeavour in the preceding Meditations to avert the effects of so melancholy a scene, by turning his thoughts at an earlier period of his life to that most valuable and indispensable inquiry, "*What must I do to* "*be saved?*"

I do not indeed presume to say that, even the last hour will be too late for the returning sinner, but I do not only affirm as a man, but pronounce as a minister of the Gospel, that he who puts off pious meditation *for the purpose of relying on a death-bed repentance*, endangers the salvation of his soul. He is surely guilty of a wilful sin, and how dreadful that state is, we need no other authority than that of an Apostle—"for if we sin wilfully after that "we have received the knowledge of the "truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice "for sin, but a certain fearful looking for "of judgment, and fiery indignation, which "shall consume the adversaries*." If under these circumstances he believes, he believes against hope: if he does *not* believe, alas! what can save him from destruction!

* Heb. x. 26, 27.

The

MED. XXXVI.

The death-bed even of the righteous, is attended with many circumstances of careful circumspection. We are taught to pray that *at the hour of death*, as well as *in the day of judgment*, *our good Lord may deliver us!* The former is the introduction to the latter; and as we pass the first important stage with religious confidence, we shall approach the latter with more joyful hope. But we may fall even at the last hour; and therefore that hour should be expected, not as one which should release us from all our troubles, as is too frequently the case, but with awful contemplation. None live so well as those who are for ever looking towards the hour of their death; and none meet that hour with more pious resignation than those who have always have had it before their eyes. Our *last hour* is an expression which may fairly comprehend our last sickness; and how many apprehensions, at that season, have not the very best of us to encounter? Is it likely that our enemy will sleep, at the moment that his prey is passing from his hands? Is it likely that our natural passions will be silent, that our natural tempers

MED. XXXVI.

and dispositions will be so entirely subdued, as not to make one effort for dominion, when our body is debilitated by sickness, and our mind weakened by personal infirmity; particularly when they have been cherished through a protracted life, and many of them are even the darlings of our old age? The possession of the mental faculties must be allowed, when we consider the old man as responsible for his behaviour in his last sickness. Petulance of temper, perverseness of disposition, uneasiness of person, and discontent of mind, are the frequent effects of a debilitated state: not less so than that insensibility which casts the vacant eye on the officiousness of friendship, or that unaccountable dislike, which converts those whom the soul held most dear, to an apprehension of their being the most bitter and implacable of enemies. The alertness, or discrimination, indeed, of more early life, we do not expect; but we look, and wish, for the calm deductions of reason, for decision of conduct and composure of soul, as the result of piety and wisdom, and as the latest ornaments of an exemplary life.

But

But let us not expect impossibilities. Though the corruption of our nature be corrected in the regenerate mind, let us remember that in the most perfect state of man, a *taint* will still remain. If this frailty appear in some, almost necessary, shades, on the pillow, even of the dying Christian, who are we to be *extreme to mark what is done amiss?*—Spare, oh spare, the momentary tumult of the expiring saint! "*The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak**." Hide in thy bosom the sacred tear, if it start from his eye; repress the heaving of his labouring breast; and when he breathes forth his last sigh, send it on thy prayer to heaven, and supplicate for his passing soul, the everlasting mercies of the Saviour!— MED. XXXVI.

How amiable is the view of Christianity, when our religious tenderness and pious attention are displayed at the bed-side of a departing friend! We are sensible that our profession of religion depends on feeling as well as fact; and that when God gave us rules of faith, he accompanied them with duties, which are at once the reward and

* Matt. xxvi. 41.

MED. XXXVI.

expression of our obedience. When *Jesus wept* at the grave of Lazarus, he designed to instruct us in the delightful duty of Christian friendship and benevolence. "We have not "an High Priest which cannot be touched "with the feeling of our infirmities, but "was in all points tempted, like as we are, "yet without sin*."

The language of a death-bed is always earnestly desired, and heard, with considerable interest. We do not wonder at the circumstance. Every man knows that he shall die, and though he is unacquainted with the manner, he is inquisitive to be informed how others have passed that line which he must cross. The country to be explored he knows only by faith. If this faith hath supported others, he trusts that, through God's help, it will support himself.

Impressed with this sentiment, I hope to receive pardon, if I convey others, with myself, to the death-bed of the excellent and judicious Hooker. If we have been benefitted by his admirable studies, in his days

* Heb. iv. 15.

of

of health, if not of ease, let us reap still more advantage from his hour of sickness, and of death. MED. XXXVI.

" After having received the blessed sa-
" crament of the body and blood of our
" Lord Jesus from the hands of his beloved
" friend and spiritual assistant, Dr. Saravia,
" the Doctor thought he saw a reverend
" gaiety and joy in his face; but it lasted
" not long, for his bodily infirmities did re-
" turn suddenly and became more visible;
" insomuch that the Doctor apprehended
" death ready to seize him; yet after some
" amendment left him at night, with a pro-
" mise to return early the day following;
" which he did, and then found him better
" in appearance, deep in contemplation, and
" not inclinable to discourse; which gave
" the Doctor occasion to inquire his pre-
" sent thoughts: to which he replied, 'That
" 'he was meditating the number and na-
" 'ture of angels, and their blessed obedi-
" 'ence and order, without which, peace
" 'could not be in heaven; and oh! that
" 'it might be so on earth!' After which
" words he said, 'I have lived to see this

" 'world

MED. XXXVI.

" ' world is made up of perturbations, and
" ' I have been long preparing to leave it,
" ' and gathering comfort for the dreadful
" ' hour of making my account with God,
" ' which I now apprehend to be near:
" ' and though I have by his grace *loved*
" ' *him in my youth, and feared him in mine*
" ' *age*, and laboured to have a conscience
" ' void of offence to him, and to all men;
" ' yet if thou, oh Lord, be extreme to
" ' mark what I have done amiss, who can
" ' abide it? And, therefore, where I have
" ' failed, Lord, shew mercy to me; for I
" ' plead not my righteousness, but the
" ' forgiveness of my unrighteousness, for
" ' his merits who died to purchase a par-
" ' don for penitent sinners. And since
" ' I owe thee a death, Lord, let it not be
" ' terrible, and then take thine own time;
" ' I submit to it! Let not mine, O Lord,
" ' but let thy will ' be done!' With which
" expression he fell into a dangerous slum-
" ber; dangerous as to his recovery; yet
" recover he did, but it was to speak only
" these few words: ' Good Doctor, God
" ' hath heard my daily petitions: for I
" ' am

" ' am at peace with all men, and he is at " ' peace with me; and from which blessed " ' assurance, I feel that inward joy which " ' this world can neither give nor take " ' from me.' More he would have spoken, " but his spirits failed him; and after a " short conflict between nature and death, " a quiet sigh put a period to his last breath, " and so he fell asleep *."

MED. XXXVI.

O Lord of life and death! have mercy upon thy aged servant. Sanctify to him the duties of his last sickness, and make them, through thy grace, abundant to his salvation. Relieve his body from the extremity of pain, but, above all, relieve his soul from sin, by conferring upon him a true faith in the alone merits of thy blessed Son, and a deep and hearty repentance. Grant that he may not depart this life without having made his peace with thee, O God, by the means which thou hast provided. Let him not deceive himself, or others, by false or flattering professions, but let his heart be emptied before thee of all

* Zouch's Walton's Lives, 8vo. p. 244.

his

MED. XXXVI.

his sins both of omission and commission, that he may come before the judgment-seat of Christ, not relying on his own righteousness, not trusting to his own works, but humbly hoping for salvation through him who died, and was buried, and rose again for us, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

MEDI-

MEDITATION XXXVII.

The Old Man's Duties in his last Sickness.

Those whom death had overspread
With his dark and dreary shade,
Lift their eyes and from afar
Hail the light of Jacob's star;
Waiting till the promis'd ray
Turn their darkness into day.
See the beams, intensely shed,
Shine o'er Sion's favour'd head.
Never may they hence remove,
God of truth and God of love.

MEYRICK.

MED. XXXVII.

WHEN Hezekiah King of Judah was sick unto death, he was visited by the Prophet Isaiah, who delivered this awful message from the Lord, "Set thine house in order: "for thou shalt die and not live*." These words may be considered as an apt intro-

* Is. xxxviii. 1.

duction

MED. XXXVII.

duction to the chamber of our *last* sickness. "*Give charge concerning thy house**." There is nothing *worldly* in the arrangement of our temporal affairs, when they are settled on proper motives, and in a proper manner. This is a duty which we owe to our family and friends. I trust that no good man, through inattention or wilful neglect, through any fearfulness or superstitious notions, would defer the settlement of his affairs, to a moment, when perhaps his *sound mind and memory* may not be able to assist him. It is always an act of justice, it is often an act of mercy, to distribute lawfully, what we have acquired lawfully, or lawfully possess. There is also a principle beyond law which it is sometimes necessary to fulfil. That principle is *equity*. I should deviate too far from the scope of these Meditations to mark the nice discriminations which become frequently our duty. But what I have observed will be sufficient to shew the impropriety, I might add, the *immorality*, of deferring to an uncertain hour, or an uncertain condition, the performance of an indispensable obligation.

* Marg. Transl.

Our

MED. XXXVII.

Our Church is so satisfied of the importance of this duty, that she directs her Ministers to bring it to the sick man's remembrance *. The claims of the widow and the orphan, of the poor and the needy, at this time, too, particularly solicit their attention. Not that one particle of merit must attach to the sick man's obedience to these duties. He is still an unprofitable servant. But if the divine impression of religion on his death-bed induce him, before he leaves the world, to express his *good will towards men*, he shews himself a disciple of that Saviour, whose liberality was as unbounded, as the end which he was sent into the world to fulfil.

Perhaps after all our endeavours in the day of health our best regulated affairs, from fluctuating circumstances, will demand some further retrospection. But the sooner this duty is discharged from the mind the better. Important as it is, more important duties press for notice. We have an *house*, it is true. We have near and dear con-

* See Rubric in the Office for the Visitation of the Sick.

nections;

MED. XXXVII.

nections; but there is one nearer and dearer connection which claims our undivided heart. "He that loveth father or mother, "wife or children more than me is not "worthy of me*." The love of these perhaps has afforded the chief happiness of our temporal life; and a greater temporal happiness than domestic love and union, God himself has not to bestow. But we must not rest in temporal enjoyments of whatever nature. God, and God only, is "the strength of our heart and our portion "for ever†."

The old man having fulfilled his purpose in the world, is now called upon to fulfil his last duty to his God. "Set thine house "in order," *thy spiritual house*: "for thou "shalt die and not live."—"Prepare to "meet thy God‡."—A more solemn and impressive admonition will not be found even in the energetic language of Scripture. What does it not imply? It stirs up *memory*, *busy meddling* memory of many things which we had long imagined forgotten: it excites an awful and apprehensive expectation.

* Matt. x. 37. † Ps. lxxiii. 25.

‡ Amos iv. 12.

Receiving

MED. XXXVII.

Receiving notice of an early introduction to an earthly monarch, our nerves are agitated, our minds unsettled, our outward appearance unready, and our replies to his most searching questions, wholly unprepared. Why; how is this? We knew ourselves long ago to be his subjects, and our conduct was regulated by written laws. Yes: but *his power!*—Had ye fulfilled *your* allegiance, you need not have dreaded *his* power.—When called into the presence of our *Maker* and our monarch, conscious, in the highest degree, of his supremacy, how much beyond all bounds will this comparison be true! We, all misery and sin: He, all greatness and perfection. But to the penitent and the lowly he is more, he is all goodness and mercy; not for their sakes who have no perfect sacrifice to offer, but for the sake of his dearly beloved Son, who undertook the bountiful office of Mediator, and has already entered heaven for us.—"Wherefore he is able to save them to the "uttermost that come unto God by him, "seeing he ever liveth to make intercession "for them *."

* Heb. vii. 25.

The

MED. XXXVII.

The pious old man in his last sickness will not forget the practice of those duties which have been so long the comfort of his life. For *this* hour they have been all laid up—they are now drawn out for use, at a season when they are most wanted, and constitute his chief consolation in death. When he is told to *prepare himself to meet his God*, he thinks a more rigid scrutiny necessary. He first inquires into the stability of his faith. If he find no wavering here, he rejoices in hope. But before that hope is confirmed, he once more *communes with his heart and searches out his spirits.* He retraces the path which led him to grace. Here he renews his repentance: not merely in a general acknowledgement, but in a particular confession, of his sins. He does so in the sincerity of his heart; willing and desirous of hiding nothing from the Almighty. He knows indeed that, from the Searcher of hearts, nothing *can be hid;* but he despises the way of the wicked, who deceive themselves by imagining that they hide from God, what they dare not look upon with their own eyes, and therefore leave buried in the dark recesses of their breast. He rejects

rejects those *smooth words* which too partial friends are apt to use to the dying, because he knows that they are inapplicable to a sinner. But he receives with thankfulness the assistance of the pious, in making the rugged path he has to travel plain, by a scriptural application of the Gospel promises.

Having enumerated the *particular* duties of the aged in my former Meditations, it is enough for me at present to recommend them all to be called up for immediate application in the chamber of our last sickness. According to our different degrees of strength, but much more according to the good pleasure of God, our last distempers may be more or less of a lingering nature. This circumstance will produce the exertion of our Christian duties in different degrees. "Every man hath his proper gift of God, "one after this manner, another after "that*." When we are called upon to suffer, let us try ourselves by this rule. As fortitude differs from patience, in that the former is a bold resistance, and the latter

* 1 Cor. vii. 7.

a calm

MED. XXXVII.

a calm endurance, of pain, so Providence hath constituted the human mind to conform itself to different kinds of suffering. Let no man then despair, even on the grounds of natural constitution. The stronger sex is an instance in the one case; the amiable suffering of feminine softness in the other. Yet, in extreme cases, we have seen the one assume the other's virtues. A sure proof that "all these worketh that one and "the self-same spirit, dividing to every man "severally as he will *"

The chamber of our last sickness elucidates this observation more than any other scene in the compass of our lives. We now find, more than ever, that there is no other refuge than in God. Our situation prompts us to look up to him as our last hope. In bestowing this confidence we find that we are not disappointed. We are never so sensible of spiritual help and comfort, and feel, in the strong language of the Apostle, that "we can do all things through Christ "which strengtheneth us †." That is, after many conflicts we experimentally know, and

* 1 Cor. xii. 11. † Phil. iv. 13.

acknow-

acknowledge, that his "grace is sufficient "for us *; sufficient for all the purposes of his will; sufficient to expel sin from its last fortress; sufficient to make every means which God uses, effectual to our salvation. MED. XXXVII.

There is another consideration too which should make the old man bless the chamber of his last sickness; he is removed from any further pressure of outward temptation. How great a blessing this is, he must be well acquainted with who hath passed so many days and years amidst the tumults of the world!—But his danger is not yet over; and therefore circumspection is still necessary. The suggestions of our perverse hearts are always ready to assail us; sometimes in the shape of unavailing regret, sometimes in the shape of disappointed pleasure. Sometimes, too, a fatal scepticism and infidelity will perplex man's latest hour. May God deliver us from such doubts! And God will deliver us, if we seek him in fervent and earnest prayer.

When all these things have passed through the mind, and left a grateful incense behind

* 2 Cor. xii. 9.

MED. XXXVII.

them, the time is come when the aged Christian properly appreciates the value of life; and what is more, when he begins to calculate the value of eternity. Oh! precious hours! Happily to him precious, whose heart is stayed on the Lord, and whose *assurance of hope* now smooths the bed of death! "I overlook the grave, and the "mere circumstance of death with all its "attendant horrors; I have heard the dying "Christian observe, for the joy that shall "be revealed, for the reception which I "trust to receive in the bosom of my Re-"deemer."

Impressed with these sentiments of true piety and religion, without impatience, distrust, or despair, the man, on whom the hand of God is laid, passes through the hour of sickness, however protracted and however painful. He shrinks not from the trial. He perceives and acknowledges how weak and vain *poor human nature* is: but how strong and powerful the kingdom of grace. "My meditation of him," says he, "my "gracious God! is indeed sweet. I did "not think that it had been so pleasant

"and

"and delightful a thing to die*!" While one spark of sensibility animates his body, his mind is fixed on Christ. With him, he began to live: with him he loves to die. May he who saved him in life, preserve him in death, and receive him to glory! MED. XXXVII.

Almighty God who hast appointed unto man the number of his days, and hast given us to know that to the longest liver those days are but few and evil: teach us to acquiesce implicitly in all thy dispensations; for what are we better than our fathers? Under this serious impression of mind, grant that we may use this world as not abusing it: that we may perform the appropriate duties of health and sickness, of youth and old age, as become the followers of him who walked among men without partaking of their infirmities. Into this span of life, give us grace to crowd all the virtues with which thou hast endowed the soul of man; all those heavenly gifts which sanctify our actions, and proceed directly from the Holy Ghost, the comforter. Make us grateful for these blessings, and account life itself

* See title-page.

MED. XXXVII.

a blessing as by it we are rendered capable of receiving redemption. But above all, give us the blessing of an happy death, that we may be translated from a life of sin and sorrow, to those realms where Christ reigns for ever at the right hand of God, and hath prepared seats for all his righteous servants. God grant that we may be reckoned in that number for Jesus Christ's sake. Amen.

MEDI-

MEDITATION XXXVIII.

The Lord's Supper: the last Seal of the Old Man's Faith.

You see *the man*, you see his hold on heaven.
YOUNG.

AMONG the interesting incidents which attend the aged man on the bed of his last sickness, none is more illustrative of his faith and hope, than his reception of the sacrament of the Lord's Supper. If he has been trained in piety, and *remembered his Creator in the days of his youth*, he will need no suggestion, in his departing years, to *remember his Redeemer* as he sinks into the grave. If he has not experienced the blessing of early piety, but has been reclaimed from vicious courses by the convictions

MED. XXXVIII.

MED. XXXVIII.

victions of his heart on the pure motives of the Gospel, still greater reason has he to remember the cause of his conversion, and to commemorate the event by a participation of what is truly called *the holy Eucharist*, or sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving. But in either case mere remembrance does not constitute the duty. We often remember what we do not imitate. We often see and admire, but as often go away and forget. The parable explains the cause of our moral forgetfulness:—"the cares of this world, "and the deceitfulness of riches, and the "lust of other things entering in, choke the "word, and it becometh unfruitful*."

That time is past: and from the advanced period of the old man's life, we now behold only the candidate for heaven. We see him in a situation where worldly cares may well be expected to be extinguished; where he has one prospect only before his eyes, and that prospect so wholly spiritual, as entirely to absorb the remaining dregs of a corrupt and sinful nature. But still he lingers on the margin of the earth; still he has occasion

* Mark iv. 19.

to

to require those divine succours which have been promised to those, who travel, in the faith and fear of God, through the valley of the shadow of death. These succours are at hand; and the administration of them shews that the voice of revelation is true to itself. MED. XXXVIII.

I would not here by any means encourage the expectation of supernatural assistance on such occasions; I would not promote an enthusiastic rapture, or a fanatic exultation in the dying, incompatible with that calm, steady, rational piety, which the long life of a consistent Christian has experienced; for I do not find such a state promised by any revelation of the Gospel. On the other hand I would not repress those warm feelings, that heightened piety, which a nearer view of everlasting happiness cannot but excite: for if ever the blessed spirit of God may be addressed as our *comforter*, it is at that moment when the soul is passing from the body. Extraordinary gifts and graces may indeed at this moment be received, for the help that cometh from above is most eminent in cases of the greatest danger, but the natural man, on ordinary occasions, has

MED. XXXVIII.

has no reason to expect an extraordinary, or particular, inspiration. The Prophets and Apostles were confessedly inspired: and I will not say that persons of great sanctity may not have been favoured, even in succeeding ages, with a more abundant effusion of the spirit. But I certainly desire to check all false feelings and imagined inspirations; and while I joy sincerely in that spirit which animates the pious Christian on the bed of death, while I behold grace poured abundantly on his heart, while I see his heart illuminated with the light of heaven, I rejoice that his feelings are consistent with his character, that he is still humble, composed, resigned, that he has no trust but in him who will *neither leave him nor forsake him*, no hope but that which is productive of *joy unspeakable and full of glory*.

Thus circumstanced, the dying Christian gladly would express the stability of his faith, and put his last seal to the profession of it. Can he do this more effectually than by a participation of the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper? How congenial with his long established piety is this memorial of

his

his Saviour's love! How fervent are the sensations of his heart, when it reclines upon its last refuge! How abstracted his mind, how concentrated his ideas when, with the first martyr Stephen, he looks up to heaven, and by faith beholds his great intercessor, *standing at the right hand of God* !* MED. XXXVIII.

So necessary a part of the sick man's duty on his bed of death has the reception of the Holy Communion been esteemed, that, by persons of another church, it has been called the *Viaticum*, that is, the last rite used (if we except perhaps the Romish sacrament of extreme unction) to prepare the passing soul for its departure. The sacred chalice, too, with the consecrated element, has been put into the dead man's hand at his interment, through superstitious notions that it will facilitate his approach to the kingdom of his Saviour. I mention this, merely to guard against superstition in every form. The church of England, as well as the church of Rome, may err by an improper application of her most sacred

* Acts vii. 55.

rites.

MED. XXXVIII.

rites. The sacrament of the Lord's supper is no *viaticum*—no talisman to produce a false confidence in a dying sinner. Had I not sometimes thought that I perceived this effect, I should not be thus earnest to protest against it. Alas! it is not a moment of repentance, nor the application of the most sacred rite that ever was established, that can make the passage to the grave secure. The refreshment of bread and wine has cheered the sick man's heart—I have known it do so—whilst the Saviour's merits have been but faintly felt This is an alarming state: but I trust that the spirit of God is working in such subjects, to bring its fruit to greater perfection.

There is another state of mind that has also fallen within my observation, which renders the reception of the Lord's supper by the sick, nugatory and vain: I mean, when the ignorant and deluded talk of *balancing their accompts* with God, *clearing off their debts*, and enumerating before him a list of their good deeds; when they use the words of Nehemiah, but without his sincerity and truth:—"remember me, oh "my

" my God, concerning this, and wipe not " out my good deeds *." When the young man addressed our Saviour, " Good master! " what good thing shall I do that I may " have eternal life †," he checked him at his first inquiry, " Why callest thou me " *good?* There is none good but one, that " is God." Such unworthy receivers call the Sacrament a *good deed* in this sense, and thus pervert its most beneficial purposes. It is a valuable fruit of faith, a seal of the promise, and a blessed mean of salvation, through the grace communicated by it. But let no man mistake the means for the end, the way that leadeth unto truth for truth itself. The plain answers of our Church Catechism will remove all delusion on this subject. " Why was the Sacrament " of the Lord's Supper ordained?—For the " continual remembrance of the sacrifice of " the death of Christ, and of the benefits " which we receive thereby. What are " those benefits?—The strengthening and " refreshing of our souls by the body and " blood of Christ, as our bodies are by the

MED. XXXVIII.

* Neh. xiii. 14. † Matt. xix. 17.

" bread

MED. XXXVIII.

" bread and wine." As our natural food is not life, though it administers to life, so the reception of this holy sacrament is not salvation, though it administers to salvation. But as life cannot be supported without natural food, so our spiritual part would decline and die without a continual supply of divine grace, by those means which God has provided.

Besides positive good works, which are easily defined, and which are truly acceptable to God when performed as the expressions of a faithful principle settled in our hearts, we find many claiming merit from the assumption of a mere negative character—*they have never injured any one*, and they *wish no one ill*. I shall not enter into this at all. The slightest knowledge of Christian truth will utterly repel it. But as these assertions are endeavoured to be supported by receiving the Lord's supper, and as I have heard the latter observations especially, frequently repeated on the bed of sickness by persons of every age, I am induced to bear this testimony against them. " When we have done all, we are unpro-
" fitable servants; we have done what was

" our

" our duty to do *;" and, " If we say that MED. XXXVIII.
" we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and
" the truth is not in us †."—Where then is the *balance of our accompt?* Low, low is our computation, and much lower our treasury, if we expect salvation on such worldly terms.

In no respects whatever will the sacrament of the Lord's supper be the comfort and refreshment of our souls, either in youth or in age, if we rest in it at all as an *external* form. It is true of this sacrament, as of circumcision, the prototype of Christian baptism, " Circumcision verily profiteth if " thou keep the law, but if thou be a " breaker of the law, thy circumcision is " made uncircumcision. For he is not a " Jew which is one outwardly, neither is " that circumcision which is outward in " the flesh; but he is a Jew which is one " inwardly, and circumcision is that of " the heart, in the spirit, and not in the " letter, whose praise is not of men but of " God ‡."—" O Almighty Lord, our God!

* Luke xvii. 1. † 1 John i. 8.
‡ Rom. ii. 25, 28, 29.

pour

MED. XXXVIII.

" pour forth thy spirit upon all thy servants!
" that those who are ministered unto, as
" well as those who minister, may attend
" upon this holy ordinance, in meekness,
" simplicity, purity, and love! And grant
" that every violation of that unblemished
" sanctity, which our high calling requires,
" may bring us to a more humble and con-
" trite sense of the darkness, impiety, im-
" purity, impotence and misery, of fallen
" nature; and prompt us continually to
" forsake ourselves, and continually to de-
" pend upon the redeeming power of Christ,
" to strengthen the divine life, which he
" hath quickened in us, and raise it to the
" perfection of thy image * !"

* Thomas a Kempis, p. 325.

MEDI-

MEDITATION XXXIX.

The Lord's Supper: the last Seal of the Old Man's Faith.

——In his blest *life*,
I see the *path*, and in his *death*, the *price*,
And in his great *ascent*, the *proof* supreme
Of immortality.

YOUNG.

WHAT subject of contemplation can be presented to the old man, better qualified to support and comfort him in his last hours, than that of the life, death, and resurrection of his blessed Saviour! But as his moments are few, and his days precious, an enlarged view of all the valuable properties communicated to man by Christ's appearance in our nature, may not be within his power. Let him therefore concentrate the whole in

MED. XXXIX.

MED. XXXIX.

in his *death*, the *price* paid for our redemption. That the subject is mysterious, will be no objection; as it is not offered to us for our dicussion, but as an object of our faith. We have reason to believe, and do believe, all that is recorded in the law of Moses, in the Psalms, and in the Prophets, confirmed by the writings of the Evangelists and Apostles, concerning Christ. Here then let us rest satisfied, and apply our belief *spiritually*, otherwise no beneficial effects can apply themselves to our hearts.

The commemoration of Jesus Christ in the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper, is that *point* which should now occupy the old man's thoughts, as it is the last seal which can now be given of his faith. A participation of this Sacrament at every preceding period, was, or ought to have been, a renewal of divine life in his soul. It is a gift indeed peculiarly intended to excite the warmest affections of a devout mind, and to kindle a flame which will burn unto eternity. Man, in his renewed state, is continually aspiring after greater degrees of perfection. He is sensible of

the loss his nature has sustained, and is no less sensible that in his own person, he has contributed to make the loss more severely felt. The means of his restoration, he has always before his eyes. He contemplates the *price* of his redemption, and is overwhelmed by its value. But as he knows the love of God in Christ to be more than equal to his utmost conceptions of mercy, he reposes in the means which God has provided, accepts the kind offer of the Mediator of man, and trusts solely to the propitiatory sacrifice which was thus given for him. MED. XXXIX.

This contemplation is comprized within a narrow compass, and all the benefits of faith, communicated by these means, are easy to be apprehended by the most aged of God's servants.

One peculiar advantage attends the aged, while thus receiving the blessed elements of bread and wine, on their *last* pillow. This renewal is their *last*. They have commemorated their Saviour, and forgotten their vows. They have communicated with the best *intentions;* but, in these intentions they have often been deceived. "The rain

MED. XXXIX.

" descended, and the wind blew, and beat " upon their house, and it fell *." Their decay of grace was in proportion to their temptations. But the same temptations will not occur again; and they may reasonably hope, through the communication of the Spirit in this holy rite, to be preserved from any further severe trials of their strength.

Now has the hour arrived, when the aged man should wholly dedicate himself to God. This act of complete devotion he cannot accomplish with surer hopes of success, than by a profound reliance on the imputed merits of his Saviour, through the beneficial means, and refreshing grace, of the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper.

Let us attend to the state of his mind upon this solemn occasion. Every pious principle connected with the great and incomprehensible Author of his being, will be visible in his conduct.—" I am a worm, " and no man †.—But, reflecting on the condescension of his Maker—" will God " indeed dwell on the earth ‡?—he adds,

* Matt. vii. 27. † Ps. xxii. 6.
‡ 1 Kings viii. 27.

" What

" What is man that thou art mindful of MED. XXXIX.
" him? or the Son of man that thou vi-
" sitest him *."—The pious old man has good reason to know that God is *mindful of him*; and he needs go no further than the spiritual banquet now offered to him, to be sensible of *his* presence, who has thus " vi-
" sited and redeemed his people †." How humbled will he feel, and yet how happy! How dejected, and yet how resigned! He casts all his cares upon God, because he knows that *God careth for him*, and will not desert him at the latter end. How blessed is the man, whose heart is, at this trying moment, stayed on the Lord! How warmly will a saving faith then apply itself to the dying Christian!—" By the replenishments
" of thy spirit," he will say, " I find my
" faith strong; yea, stronger than I ex-
" pected on the bed of death. This is thy
" mercy, and I thankfully accept it as a
" token of thy love. *Even so: come Lord*
" *Jesus!*"

This sense of guilt, and sense of pardon, raises the good old man's mind to the

* Ps. viii. 6. † Luke i. 68.

MED. XXXIX.

warmest feelings of adoration. When he has surrendered up himself to God, "*God* "*is in all his thoughts.*" His union now truly commences with a spiritual nature, and the present object of his wishes is the *perfect blessedness of perfect spirits.* The sensible representation of his Saviour's death, he considers as a spiritual communion with him, and with the spirits of just men made perfect, his family in heaven as well as his family on earth. How does the holy Sacrament, in this view, excite the pure grace of devotion, and bear on its wings to heaven that heart, now saturated with human vanities, and exclaiming in the fervour of true Christianity, "I will receive "the cup of salvation, and call upon the "name of the Lord * !"

"*The name of the Lord!*"—how does the expression excite in us an imagination of all that is *great, wonderful, and holy!* Though the nature of God be above the comprehension of man, and his essence not to be conceived by the human understanding, yet has divine revelation made known to us the

* Psalm cxvi. 13.

three distinct persons of the Godhead, and explained, how they are severally concerned in the salvation of man. A critical review of the Christian doctrines will not be expected on the bed of death; but the purity of our reception of the Sacrament will depend on the purity of our faith; and the purity of our faith is essential to salvation. How far God will pardon error, it is not for man to decide. "Charity hopeth "all things;" and the bed of death is the scene for *charity*. But the dying Christian receives his consolation from the fulness of his faith, and offers up his prayers to a good and gracious God, through the merits and mediation of Jesus Christ, and by the influences of the Holy Spirit. Had not an infinite sacrifice been necessary, the Son of God would not have been that sacrifice, and had not human nature failed, there would have been no occasion for the replenishment of divine grace by the spirit of the Lord. These gifts and graces are fully communicated by a faithful reception of the Lord's Supper: and how powerfully they support the venerable Christian in the chamber

MED. XXXIX.

MED. XXXIX.

ber of his last sickness, is best known to those who have beheld him there.

An old man, thus happily disposed, is an object that cannot even be thought of, without reverence and a desire of imitation. May the hand that writes, and the eye that reads this, feel strengthened by this contemplation of the old man's faith! He speaks to us in the words of Paul the aged —"Be ye followers of me: even as I also "am of Christ*."

The communion of Saints is now complete in the breast of the aged, and devout, communicant. He is at peace with man; he is at peace with God through Christ. He has received the *unction of the holy One*, and is now waiting with resignation and perfect satisfaction for the hour of his deliverance.

But as it may happen, from particular circumstances, arising either from his own infirmities or otherwise, that the good old man may be prevented from communicating on his death-bed according to the

* 1 Cor. xi. 1.

rites

rites of his church, let not his mind be depressed. The cause perhaps cannot be removed. But he is no *formalist;* and though the reception of the Lord's Supper would have added to his comfort, he acquiesces in the circumstance that witholds it. But his piety is not prevented: he meditates on the sacred subject, and thus, by what has been called *spiritual communion*, enjoys that composure of soul which nothing earthly can give, or take away. MED. XXXIX.

"Christ died for all, that they which "live, should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto Christ which died for "them *."—"From this moment, on Christ, "I consecrate that life to thee, which thou "hast redeemed from the slavery of sin and "Satan, by thy most precious blood. Fortify my soul I beseech thee, against all "the temptations of the world, the flesh, "and the Devil, by the remembrance of "this thy love, that I may live to thee, "and to the glory of God †." And when that awful hour shall come which will remove me from the present world, may I be

* 2 Cor. v. 15. † Bishop Wilson.

pre-

MED. XXXIX.

prepared to meet my God, with a mind and spirit, which shall be wholly thine. Give me such heavenly graces as shall be necessary for my safe removal, and receive me to thyself in the kingdom of everlasting glory!

NOTE.

The observations of good Bishop Sanderson, in Honest Isaac Walton's narrative of his last moments, are peculiarly illustrative of the subject of the two preceding meditations.

"The blessed Sacrament," said the pious Bishop, "even by way of preparation for it, gives occasion to "all conscientious receivers to examine the performance of their vows, since they received that last seal "for the pardon of their sins past; and also to examine and research their hearts, and make penitent "reflections on their failings; and that done to bewail them seriously, and then make new vows and "resolutions to obey all God's commands better, and "beg his grace to perform them. And that this being "faithfully done, then the Sacrament repairs the decays of grace, helps us to conquer infirmities, gives "us grace to beg God's grace, and then gives us what "we beg; makes us still hunger and thirst after his "righteousness, which we then receive, and being assisted with our own endeavours, will still so dwell in "us, as to become our sanctification in this life, and our "comfort on our last sick beds."———As his natural life decayed, his spiritual life seemed to be more strong, and his faith more confirmed; still labouring

to

to attain that holiness and purity, without which none shall see God.——The day before he took his bed (which was three days before his death) he, that he might receive a new assurance for the pardon of his sins past, and be strengthened in his way to the new Jerusalem, took the blessed Sacrament of the body and blood of his, and our, blessed Jesus, in as awful, humble, and ardent a manner, as outward reverence could express. After the praise and thanksgiving for this blessing was ended, he spake to this purpose: "I "have now to the great joy of my soul tasted of the "all-saving sacrifice of my Saviour's death and pas- "sion; and with it received a spiritual assurance that "my sins past are pardoned, and my God at peace "with me: and that I shall never have a will or "power to do any thing that may separate my soul "from the love of my dear Saviour. Lord, confirm "this belief in me; and make me still to remember "that it wast thou, O God, that tookest me out of "my mother's womb, and hast been the powerful pro- "tector of me to this present moment of my life: "thou hast neither forsaken me now I am become "grey headed, nor suffered me to forsake thee in the "late days of temptation, and sacrifice my conscience "for the preservation of my liberty or estate. It was "not of myself, but by grace that I have stood, when "others have fallen under my trials; and these mer- "cies I now remember with joy and thankfulness; and "my hope and desire is, that I may die remembering "this, and praising thee, my merciful God."—

MED. XXXIX.

Thus this pattern of meekness and primitive innocence changed this for a better life:—"it is now too late to "mine may be like his: for I am in the eighty fifth "year of my age; and God knows it hath not: but I

"most

MED. XXXIX.

" most humbly beseech Almighty God that my death " may!"—

To this the learned and pious Editor of Walton's Lives*, subjoins,

" Sic mihi contingat vivere, sicque mori!"

The writer of these pages, sensible of the value of such examples in a thoughtless, he might too justly add, a dissipated age, trusts that he shall be joined by many of his readers in the ardent prayer—" Let me " die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be " like his†."

* " The Lives of Dr. John Donne;—Sir Henry Wotton;—Mr. Richard " Hooker;—Mr. George Herbert;—and Dr. Robert Sanderson; by " Isaac Walton. With notes, and the Life of the Author by Thomas " Zouch, D.D. F.L.S. Prebendary of Durham."

† Numb. xxiii. 10.

MEDI-

MEDITATION XL.

The Death-bed of the Just.

Man's highest triumph ! man's profoundest fall !
The death-bed of the just !—

IT is delightful to prolong those moments which are spent in contemplating the *death-bed of the just.* The natural horror which the situation inspires, when we behold the wicked and the worldly laid upon their last couch, is here turned to songs of praise and sentiments of the purest thankfulness. It is the motive which, in the one case, renders this condition, *man's highest triumph*, and in the other, *man's profoundest fall.* MED. XL.

When the skilful navigator has brought his vessel to a secure harbour through shoals and quicksands, through storm and tempest,

MED. XL.

tempest, however shattered his sails, or beaten his masts, we congratulate with him on having well fulfilled the purposes of his voyage. But when the careless mariner neglects his compass, and forsakes his helm, when the unruly ship, driven by an Euroclydon, founders where two seas meet, and the ship-master with his unhappy crew descend into the abyss, together, while we censure his want of skill, and lament his untimely fate, we condemn his wilful ignorance and obdurate folly. Such is the comparative situation of the righteous and the wicked, on the bed of death. Those, whom sin hath conquered, fall the slaves of sin; those, who have obtained the victory, enjoy the triumph. But think not that the defect of natural strength, on the one part, or the abundance of it on the other, is the cause of this great disparity. Help from above is always at hand, and either was, or might have been, afforded to both. The one rejected, what was truly acceptable to the other. "The Lord with his own "right hand, and his holy arm hath gotten "himself the victory *."

* Ps. xcviii. 1.

When

When the minister of God is called to the bed-side of the sick, he contemplates man under a variety of characters. Those who are laid there in the prime of life, call forth reflections of a different nature. I view those who are in the wane, far declined from the meridian of life, in the latest shadow of the evening. One old man perhaps possesses vigour of intellect, a proportionable strength of body, and an hilarity of mind. He does not choose to think that death is near. Conversation with cheerful friends passes off the time. Their polite attentions give no intimation of danger; he has injured no man, and has a good name, as well as good property, to bequeath to his children. He relies on his morality, and *has his reward.* Another has lengthened out a sickly life to an unexpected period. The care of his health has been the great object of many valuable years. He has endeavoured to place death at as great a distance from him as possible. He has succeeded in his attempts, and has *his* reward. A third has been the object of great bodily affliction; his mind too has received many rude assaults. He too has been without offence in his own estimation, MED. XL.

MED. XL.

tion, and has done nothing to deserve such severity of infliction. In his own opinion, and in that of his consoling friends, his sufferings must have atoned for all his sins, if he acknowledges that he has had any; and so, with false confidence, or at least without much fear, he meets his end.

Thus might I proceed in delineating characters, every one of which, in the lukewarm and mistaken world, would meet with approving friends, and flattering counsellors. But a more intimate inspection of these characters would shew that in all one thing would be wanting, *the grace of God which bringeth salvation.* Converse with them, and you hear nothing of the original blemish of their nature, or of their own defection from righteousness. How should you?—for they imagine that man is by nature upright; and not having felt sin, they know nothing of its convictions, much less of the necessity of their own conversion. Some of them perhaps will acknowledge human frailty and personal failings, but they refer you upon all occasions to the unbounded goodness of their Creator. If you reply, that God is just, as well as merciful, their

their answer is at hand; sincerity will make up all deficiencies, and integrity will preclude justice. If you mention that they have no natural integrity, and therefore that some atonement for sin was indispensably necessary; for punishment is the natural consequence of fault; that this atonement was made for sinners by the vicarious suffering of the Son of God, who for this purpose became also Son of man, and that, by him only, through faith and repentance, they can be saved in the day of the Lord—alas! you speak a language which they do not understand. If you open to them the prospect of another world, they acquiesce perhaps in your argument, express their hopes of being partakers of it, but are miserably defective in making out their *title*. MED. XL.

These visits will not give us pleasure. As the several characters have no religious motives for their support, no religious effects will be expected in their conduct.

We may attend upon many other persons on the bed of death with no happier success. A life of thoughtless levity, and a life of decided iniquity, afford no hope upon

MED. XL.

upon the death-bed, but in the repentance of an hour. What! the repentance of an *hour*, after the forbearance of threescore, *fourscore* years! Yes! this is all that now remains of the remnant of life. —The impression made upon the mind by this consideration, leaves no room but for awful silence, and profound meditation.—" Behold, the Lord's hand is not " shortened that it cannot save, neither " his ear heavy that it cannot hear * !"

This ground is so tender that I dare venture no further on it; and I would recommend to every one, whose eye may glance over these pages, not to trust his salvation to so slender a reed.

But let me turn my mind's eye, and my complacent thoughts, on the pious Christian approaching the long limits of his days. A gentle decay is visible in his frame; a little shattered perhaps is his intellectual powers; but his faith is as lively as in the days of youth. This is that golden thread, which runs through every artery, and strengthens every limb.

* Is. lix. 1.

This

This is that vital spirit, which will survive the grave. His friends see him, and admire him. They perceive now that his piety was sincere, and acknowledge that his hope is strong. His behaviour in this trying hour is not the effort of a momentary conviction, a sudden enthusiastic rapture, or the consequence of too flattering an expectation. It is the result of an holy life. The pure, steady, consistent piety of ne who has feared God, rested in his Saviour's merits, and experienced the refreshing graces of the Holy Ghost. Now, may you see the love of God in his heart; a love which is stronger than death, and absorb every painful feeling that may agitate his tender frame. When his eye can no longer trace the pages of sacred revelation, his friends perform for him the grateful task. "Let me hear once again," said a valuable and pious friend, "the "words of that beautiful psalm"—which had, for many years, formed a part of his daily devotion—"Have mercy upon me, "O God, according to thy loving kind- "ness; according to the multitude of thy "tender mercies, blot out my transgres-

MED. XL.

MED. XL.

" sions *." The expression of his humility was amiable and affecting; springing " out " of a pure heart and of a good con- " science †."—He would pray with his beloved family—his voice faulters—his voice ceases—his favourite son concludes his prayer. The eye which had long looked upon them with parental tenderness, now closes—the soul is in heaven.

My good and aged friends! spectators of this scene, let us finish with prayer: " In thy hand, O my God, my times are. " Make me ready to obey thy call, and " at thy signal to go forth. I thank thee " that I have been permitted so long to " partake of the comforts of life, and to " be a spectator of the wisdom and good- " ness displayed in thy works. I thank " thee that thou hast borne so long with " my infirmities and provocations, hast al- " lowed me to look up to thy promises in " the Gospel, and to hear the words of " eternal life uttered by my great Re- " deemer. With gratitude, faith, and love, " I commit my soul to thee. Continue to

* Ps. li. 1. † 1 Tim. i. 5.

" me

" me this confidence to my latest hour, MED. XL.
" that I may say, in the fervour and sin-
" cerity of my heart, ' Lord! now lettest
" ' thou thy servant depart in peace; for
" ' mine eyes have seen thy salvation * !'"

* Blair, vol. ii. s. 3.

THE END.

Law and Gilbert, Printers, St. John's Square, London.

Lately Published,

BY THE SAME AUTHOR,

1. THE MEDITATIONS OF A RECLUSE; chiefly on Religious Subjects. The Third Edition. In One Volume, Octavo. Price in boards 8s.

2. MEDITATIONS FOR PENITENTS: and for those engaged in the important Duty of SELF-EXAMINATION. In One Volume, Octavo. Price in boards 9s.

3. LECTURES ON THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES, delivered in the Parish-Church of Stockton-upon-Tees, during Lent, in the Years 1803, 1804, 1805, and 1806. In Two Volumes, Octavo, with three Maps, illustrating the Travels of the Apostles. Price in boards 14s.

4. A SECULAR ESSAY; containing a retrospective View of Events, connected with the Ecclesiastical History of England, during the Eighteenth Century: With Reflections on the State of practical Religion in that Period. In One Volume, Octavo. Price 7s.

3477 7

Deacidified using the Bookkeeper process.
Neutralizing agent: Magnesium Oxide
Treatment Date: Oct, 2005

PreservationTechnologies
A WORLD LEADER IN PAPER PRESERVATION

111 Thomson Park Drive
Cranberry Township, PA 16066
(724) 779-2111

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS
0 016 063 585 A